This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Africa, South — Hist., 1899-1902
— War — Personalia

BNY
Pollock

WITH SEVEN GENERALS IN THE BOER WAR

AUTOGRAPHS OF SOME CELEBRITIES OF THE SIEGE.

Major Goold-Adams, Major Vyvyan, Major Panzera, Colonel Walford, Lieut.-Colonel Hore (afterwards of Eland's River fame), Capt. Singleton, Capt. Holden, Major Godley, Lady Sarah Wilson, Vet.-Lieut. Dunlop Smith, Major Lord Edward Cecil, Major-General Baden-Powell, Lieut. Swinburne.

AUTOGRAPHS OF SOME CELEBRITIES OF THE SIEGE AND RELIEF.

Major Hon. Maurice Gifford, Lieut.-Colonel Peakman, Capt. H.S.H. Prince Alexander of Teck, Brigadier-General Mahon, Major Sir John Willoughby, Capt. Bell-Smythe, Major Vyvyan, Major Panzera, Lieut.-Colonel Edwards, Major Goold-Adams, Colonel Plumer, Lieut.-Colonel Hon. H. White, Major (Lieut.-Colonel) King, Colonel Walford, Major Weil, Colonel Frank Rhodes, Major Karri Davis, Major-General Baden-Powell, and Major Baden-Powell.

[*Frontispiece.*

WITH SEVEN GENERALS

IN

THE BOER WAR

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE

BY

MAJOR A. W. A. POLLOCK

Late the Prince Albert's Somersetshire Light Infantry, and a Special Correspondent of the "Times" in the Boer War

With Illustrations, Maps, and Plans

LONDON

SKEFFINGTON & SON, 163 PICCADILLY

Publishers to H.M. the Queen and H.R.H. the Prince of Wales

1900

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
209680B
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
1942
R L

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

PREFACE.

THIS narrative of my personal experiences during the Boer War covers the period between October 14th, 1899, and July 20th, 1900. It commences with my departure from England in the *Dunottar Castle* with Sir Redvers Buller and the Headquarters Staff, and concludes with my return home in the same ship, and in the same cabin, after nine months' absence.

It was my good fortune to accompany many different forces during the campaign, and I have endeavoured to describe what I saw of the various operations, together with the impressions conveyed to my mind by these and other events. The Editor of the *Times* has kindly allowed me to utilize my published and unpublished letters, and some of these have been incorporated with a greater quantity of fresh matter in the composition of the present volume. The part relating to the relief of Mafeking is entirely new, my original letter to the *Times* having most unluckily

failed to reach its destination. This has been a great loss to me, but I have done the best I can to replace it with the aid of my diary and field note-book. It had been my hope to include a really interesting series of illustrations, but out of seven dozen photographs not one was really fit for reproduction. The films were all defective, and nearly all absolutely bad. Consequently the pictures published represent the skill of the Printer's artist rather than the veritable productions of my camera.

For the use of three official maps I am indebted to Sir John Ardagh, to whom I now venture to offer my most sincere thanks.

A. W. A. POLLOCK.

RAGLAN BARRACKS, DEVONPORT,
Nov. 20th, 1900.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Southampton to Cape Town	1
II.	Cape Town to Queenstown	9
III.	Queenstown and Neighbourhood	14
IV.	Arrival of Sir William Gatacre	24
V.	Boers occupy Stormberg: British concentrate at Putter's Kraal	36
VI.	The Stormberg Disaster	50
VII.	The Stormberg Disaster: Personal Experiences	65
VIII.	After Stormberg	76
IX.	De Montmorency's Operations about Dordrecht	91
X.	The Action near Cypheergat, January 3 ...	109
XI.	Chiefly Reflections	125
XII.	The Colonial Division and a Visit to East London	148
XIII.	A Glimpse of Rensburg under Major-General Clements	154
XIV.	Paardeburg	167
XV.	The Engagement at Poplar Grove	182
XVI.	The Action of Abraham's Kraal—Dreifontein and the Occupation of Bloemfontein ...	190
XVII.	Lord Methuen's Operations about Boshof ...	204
XVIII.	Relief of Mafeking—Brigadier Mahon's Flying Column	234
XIX.	Mafeking, Johannesburg, and Home	257
	Appendix I.—Mr. Reitz's Manifesto	285
	Appendix II.—Bond Treason	290

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS, MAPS, AND PLANS.

	TO FACE PAGE
AUTOGRAPHS OF SOME CELEBRITIES	*Frontispiece*
ARENDSE, JESS, CORNELIUS, AND THE "WEAGON" ...	8
CAPTAIN THE HON. RAYMOND H. L. J. DE MONTMORENCY	34
MAP OF STERKSTROOM, STORMBERG AND DISTRICT	54
MAP OF STORMBERG ATTACHED TO GEN. GATACRE'S REPORT	56
PLAN WHICH ACCOMPANIED THE AUTHOR'S LETTER TO THE *TIMES*	64
THE DEFENDER OF THE DONGA	106
LABUSCHAGNE'S NEK (SKETCH MAP)	110
BOOT AND SADDLE	112
TROOPER BURN, V.C., AND "BABA"	116
WATERING HORSES IN THE BED OF THE MARATSANI ...	246
BRIGADIER-GEN. MAHON'S HEADQUARTERS AT JAN MABISSI'S	248
THE GENERAL ADVANCE: POM-POM TEAMS COMING UP ...	254
A BARRICADE AT MAFEKING	256
MAP OF MAFEKING BESIEGED	258
THE SMALLEST DEFENDER OF MAFEKING	260
THE MAFEKING ARTILLERY	262
THE QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY PARADE	264
MENU, QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY DINNER	266
DINNER GIVEN BY THE SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS TO BRIGADIER-GENERAL MAHON AND STAFF	*Between* 268, 269
GUESTS AND HOSTS	

WITH SEVEN GENERALS IN THE BOER WAR.

CHAPTER I.

SOUTHAMPTON TO CAPE TOWN.

It was a quarter past one in the afternoon of Friday, October 13, 1899, when it was decided that I should embark for South Africa upon the following day, as special correspondent of the *Times*, with Sir Redvers Buller's Headquarters. The bustle and worry of the next few hours defy description, and, at all events, the chief point is that I succeeded in collecting a reasonably complete kit and in catching the steamer.

The departure from Southampton was an experience that is unlikely to fade from the memory of any who witnessed it. The ovation that hailed Sir Redvers as he went on board was tremendous; but the really dramatic incident was to follow when the *Dunottar Castle* left her moorings and set off on her voyage. The cheering ceased as if by magic, and the vast multitude of people on the wharfs, far and near, broke into the strains of "God save the Queen." A British crowd

may lack the musical refinement of some others, but when the Briton uncovers his head and sings the National Anthem he means what he sings, and his sincerity is so obvious that no room for doubt upon the subject can linger in the minds of any that hear him.

It was just 5 p.m. when the ship sailed. The sea was calm, and when the dinner-bugle sounded there were very few who failed to answer the summons. But during the night the wind began to blow, and, by the time we were off Ushant, the steamer had become sufficiently unsteady to compel many to prefer their cabins to the full publicity of the saloon or deck. A good many who ventured to appear at breakfast beat a hasty retreat, and, under the circumstances, it was considered useless to attempt the Church Service. Towards evening the weather moderated, only, however, to become worse than ever on Monday morning, and it continued more or less bad all the way to Madeira, where we arrived at 6 a.m. on the 18th.

I went ashore with three others, and, after an excellent breakfast at the hotel, we proceeded up the mountain in bullock-sledges to a charming house belonging to a brother of one of our party. The view over Funchal and the surrounding country was perfectly lovely. It seemed scarcely possible to imagine anything more delightful for an invalid than to sit on the terrace and feast the eyes upon the beautiful scene below and around. To me it appeared as if absolute happiness

might be found in climbing the mountains that rose behind, and then resting in that lovely spot, dreaming over each day's pleasure and making plans for the next. But, from what I can gather, the Englishman in Madeira soon finds being carried in a hammock far more pleasant than climbing mountains. In fact, the climate is so enervating that an active life becomes impossible after the first two or three days in the island.

We descended the hill in toboggans sliding at a furious pace over the cobble-stones with which the narrow roads are paved. Guided by an inferior charioteer, or, in the event of his coming to grief, the chances of breaking one's neck during the slide down that mountain can scarcely fall short of a positive certainty. However, we experienced no misadventure, and returned in safety to the ship, where the narrative of a somewhat remarkable adventure awaited me.

During the previous night one of the passengers had an attack of D. T., and by his curious proceedings and conversation awakened his cabin-companion, who, before taking any steps to abate the nuisance, put his hand under his pillow to get hold of his watch and ascertain the time. This move was met by the cry, "None of that now!" and—quickly presenting a revolver—"Hands up!" The lunatic, of course, suspected that his companion had been feeling under his pillow for his own revolver. The obstacles to sleeping out the remainder of the night consisted of one lunatic, one revolver, and one razor. By dint of great tact, combined

with equal pluck, the aggrieved person became possessed of the two last; and then, calling for assistance, handed over the first to the ship's authorities, by whom this dangerous person was speedily confined—none too soon.

South of Madeira the sea was calm, but the weather soon became hot as we approached the tropics. On the 22nd we overtook the *Nineveh* with the New South Wales Lancers on board. Much cheering of course. Two days later nearly every one was inoculated against "enteric," after hearing a short lecture by poor Hughes of the R.A.M.C. who was afterwards killed at Colenso. The result was that for several days a great many were cripples and some completely laid up. The tender inquiries as to each other's condition called in mind one's school days and a time of general vaccination.

On the 28th we met the *Australasian* homeward bound, and on a board fixed to the bridge we read the words, "Boers defeated; three battles; Penn Symons killed." The excitement caused by this intelligence was immense, but it was not noisy. That Penn Symons had been killed told us what we should, in any event, have taken for granted—that the fighting had taken place in Natal. But the fact that there had been three battles already filled us with astonishment. Some said that we should be too late, and that the war must be already over. But the majority thought differently. That the Boers had fought three times was generally held to mean that their so-called "defeats" had not

been accompanied by much punishment, and that unless the last of the series had been decisive, there would be plenty more fighting to follow. Needless to say, our anxiety to reach Cape Town and hear particulars was acute. After an interval of but little more than forty-eight hours, that seemed indeed a lifetime, we anchored in Table Bay on the evening of Monday, the 30th, at about 9 o'clock. We had expected that within a few moments some one would come on board with news, but we were long kept in suspense; and before any information reached us, we had partly made up our minds that everything was not entirely as we could wish. Clearly, if important successes had been gained, there would have been a rush to communicate the fact, and there would also have been a noisy welcome from the shore and harbour. Everything, upon the contrary, was quiet, and when at last we were made aware of all that had happened, a general sadness prevailed throughout the ship. There were many on board who had heard of the deaths of friends and relatives, and the situation generally seemed far from satisfactory. The newspapers that had been brought on board were read aloud in the smoking-room and music-saloon, until every bit of news had been disclosed; and at a very late hour the passengers retired for the last time to their berths.

Next morning Sir Redvers Buller landed at Cape Town and had a fine reception. Spirits that had been more or less damped by the want of success that had attended the opening of the campaign were quickly

revived by the advent of the Commander-in-Chief in whom all had the most implicit confidence.

My stay in Cape Town was brief. I purchased a good-looking and well-bred American mare that took my fancy. She was a blue roan, about 15 hands 2 inches, with wonderful legs and feet, and extraordinary good quarters. Her shoulders were above the average, and she was a very pleasant hack; a trifle rash perhaps, but with a nice mouth, and no tricks that work would not suppress. Upon the other hand, she had an ugly head, and was a bit slack in the loins. I christened her *Jess*, and a right good mare she proved. To ride a long journey, or under fire, she was equally good. Her long swinging canter was as smooth as a first-class carriage on the London and North Western, and under fire she was as steady as a rock, almost from the first. Poor Jess! What the march to Bloemfontein began, that to Mafeking completed, and it was a mere skeleton that I sold at Lichtenburg to a man who swore by all that is holy that he would treat her well, and give her no work until she had completely regained condition. The entry of June 7 in my diary reads: "Trekked to Lichtenburg, 12 miles, and joined Hunter. Sold Jess for £10—sad. Bought 'Bobs' for £26 including his rugs, etc." "Bobs" had been bought at Bloemfontein on the day of Lord Roberts' entry by a brother correspondent—Mr. Filson Young, of the *Manchester Guardian*, with whom I thenceforward had a joint establishment—and, my friend being ordered home from Lichtenburg, I was only too glad to jump

at the chance of securing his pony. Bobs, too, had been to Mafeking, but ponies do better on hard work and short rations than horses. In addition to Jess, I bought a small American wagon which I loaded with food, drink, and other necessaries. It was a sort of grocer's cart, but it served my purpose admirably, and accompanied me in all my wanderings until I was persuaded to sell it when starting for Mafeking. Probably it might have broken down; the tracks were very bad in many places, and some of the drifts taxed the powers of four horses in the two-wheeled "Cape cart" that I substituted for what my "Cape boy" Arendse called the "weagon." Yet I missed the comfort of crawling into the "weagon" to sleep on a wet night, and the sort of cupboard at the back, in which the provisions and liquor stood ready to hand on shelves, had always been an immense convenience that the "hugger-mugger" of afterwards contrasted with most unfavourably.

There was no use in my remaining idle at Cape Town pending the departure of the Commander-in-Chief, and it seemed better that I should proceed at once to the front and rejoin headquarters after their arrival. The horses for the staff had been sent to Queenstown, and consequently one might take for granted that their riders would follow to the same place, or to some other in that part of the country. Therefore it was arranged that I should go to De Aar, where a special correspondent of the *Times*, Mr. Landon, had already arrived, and would probably be able to suggest the best place

for my temporary employment. Accordingly, on Friday evening, November 3, after having first seen Jess, Arendse, and the "weagon" safely loaded on a goods train, I took my place in the mail and started on my journey.

ARENDSE, JESS, CORNELIUS, AND THE "WEAGON."

[*To face p.* 8.

CHAPTER II.

CAPE TOWN TO QUEENSTOWN.

TRAVELLING by night from Cape Town, the wonderful scenery of the Hex mountains is hidden from view. Fortunately, however, my journey homewards at the end of June carried me by daylight through this truly magnificent country. The railway winds round the hills, as only Cape railways do, and every one of the grand features that meet the eye is presented from three or four different points of view as the train rambles through a valley or zigzags up a mountain side towards the passes or "neks" by which the line surmounts a variety of tremendous obstacles. Of all this I saw nothing at the time, and by daybreak the route lay through a somewhat desolate and far less interesting country. The monotony was broken at Nelspoort about 5 p.m., where the surroundings became distinctly picturesque, more especially a curious pyramid-shaped kopje on the eastern side of the railway just north of the station. A little further on was a very rich-looking farm upon the same side. At Nelspoort itself there was also a nice farm, and near it, apparently returning from a visit to the other, was a tall girl in a pretty

white frock, her thick brown hair tied with a pink ribbon in a single great plait. After this refreshing vision the "Karroo" desert seemed for a long time far less uninterestingly repulsive.

At 2.30 a.m. on the 5th the train reached De Aar, where Landon met me, after a long, weary wait since midnight, when we ought to have arrived. From him I learned that the troops which had until recently occupied Naauwpoort, Stormberg, and other small stations, had been withdrawn during the previous day to De Aar and Queenstown. Except in the case of Stormberg—a strong position that it was well worth risking a good deal in order to retain possession of—this concentration was a thoroughly sound proceeding. The isolated detachments were too weak to oppose the enemy's advance with any hope of success, and yet strong enough to involve a serious loss of prestige in the event of their capture or destruction.

After a short conversation we decided that, under all the circumstances, it would be best for me to continue at once to Queenstown without regard for the apparent probability that Jess, Arendse, etc., might be unable to follow. The belief generally prevailed that the train now about to start was certainly the last that had any chance of getting through. Accordingly I abandoned my belongings to their fate, while at the same time congratulating myself upon having retained all my personal baggage, instead of sending the greater part in the horse-box as I had at first intended.

Three hours late the train at length proceeded on its

way, and at 11.30, instead of 8.30 a.m., I had breakfast at Steynsberg, a small town about forty miles west of Stormberg Junction, and a hotbed of "Bond" Dutchmen. We passed many ostrich farms on both sides of the line, more particularly in the neighbourhood of Rosmead Junction, and thence towards Steynsburg. Game seemed to be scarce, but I saw three Paauw—the great bustard—and great quantities of the brown plover—commonly called "Kivi-chi," a name derived from the cry of the bird, just as the common green plover at home is called a "Pee-wit." With our arrival at Stormberg Junction the excitement of the journey ended, since there could no longer be any serious danger of the train being "stuck up;" and shortly afterwards we reached Molteno, where luncheon awaited the passengers. The station-master at Stormberg was a most estimable old man and a tremendous Britisher. He confided to me with many chuckles how his suspicions had been aroused, he knew not why, at the sight of a couple of quite innocent-looking packing-cases which on being opened proved to contain rifles. He had taken upon himself to forward these goods to the military authorities instead of to the proper consignee—no doubt to the infinite annoyance of the latter.

At Molteno we found the armoured train with a detachment of Cape Police in trucks attached to it. This caused considerable delay, as it apparently occurred to no one to shunt this train in order to allow the mail to pass. However in course of time we reached Queenstown, where I was fortunate enough to find a

bedroom at the Royal Hotel—not in the house, but in the stable-yard. This, however, was far better than having to sleep under a wagon or on the open veldt, and I was thankful when I sat down to a somewhat late dinner that a night's rest in a fairly comfortable bed had been secured after spending two nights in the train.

Queenstown was full of refugees from the border and from the Free State, many of whom were in a state of utter destitution and in receipt of relief from the kindly townsfolk—Mr. Peacock, a wealthy merchant, being at the head of the charitable organization and well backed up by all classes. Many of these unfortunate people must be utterly ruined unless they receive ample compensation after the war is over. Apart from their present troubles, the British section of the community in districts north of Queenstown has suffered endless annoyance, amounting to veritable persecution, for several years past. Disloyalty pervades the Dutch population throughout the Colony, and the "Bond" has been almost universally triumphant. There are bright exceptions, of course, such as Mr. Theophilus Schreiner, whose letter to the *Cape Times* of November 7 is printed in the Appendix; but Dutchmen sufficiently enlightened to be naturally "loyal" are few and far between. The race hatred that has arisen springs from the contempt that Dutchmen have learned to feel for everything British, and for this we have only ourselves to blame. Firmness in the past would have prevented the terrible war that a long reign of pusillanimity has

produced. It is, curiously enough, the fashion of those in England who are directly responsible for the war to contend that it might and ought to have been avoided. Nothing is more true; but these gentlemen overlook the fact that it has been the very policy of which the party to which they belong have been the exponents, that has provoked the conflict by allowing a tiny spark that might easily have been quenched, to grow into the fierce flame which has so severely tried our resources in the inevitable task of extinguishing it. But for the disloyalty of some and the weakness of other British politicians at home, the Transvaal would never have armed, nor would there have been any war. Poor Kruger has good reason to curse those who have so grossly deceived him as to the real temper and power of the British Empire. Let it be granted that the arming of the Transvaal to an immoderate extent was the result of the "Raid." So it was. But it was owing to the misgovernment and consequent unrest of the country that the raid itself came to be conceived, and had the Convention of 1881 been enforced with even reasonable firmness and consistency, there would have been no raid, because there could have been no incentives to promote it.

CHAPTER III.

QUEENSTOWN AND NEIGHBOURHOOD.

QUEENSTOWN is a very pretty little place, most charmingly situated, but tactically indefensible, unless by a force so large that there could be no excuse for shutting itself up. The town lies in a broad basin surrounded by hills that would need to be held against the enemy, and a perimeter of at least fourteen miles would require to be occupied in order to present a really good defence. The garrison at the time of my arrival consisted of a Naval Brigade with two 12-pounders, and the headquarters and four companies of the Royal Berkshire Regiment with the Mounted Infantry company of that excellent corps. In addition to this there were sundry detachments of Cape Mounted Rifles, Cape Police and Volunteers. The C. M. R. had also their battery of six 7-pounder muzzle-loading screw guns, as well as a battery of Maxims. A couple of antique 9-pounder muzzle-loading field guns under Second-Lieut. Reeves, Royal Artillery, completed this formidable array, amounting in all to some 1300 of all ranks, with ten guns of sorts and six Maxims. Practically speaking, the two naval guns were efficient weapons and the

remainder more or less useless—with the exception of the Maxims.

Under such circumstances it is scarcely to be wondered at that the military authorities regarded the defence of Queenstown as an impossibility, and contented themselves with making an entrenched camp to be defended without regard for anything else than the protection of the troops themselves. This entrenched camp was, however, constructed on an ill-chosen position, commanded on all sides, and even had it been tenable, it failed to fulfil the only object that could justify its existence—namely, to deny to the enemy the use of the railway. It was, moreover, so close to the town—only about 800 yards from the south-western outskirts—that in any fighting that might take place the latter must be compromised. This error was quite inexcusable, because an excellent position was ready to hand at a distance of about one and a half miles from that chosen, and from it the railway would have been commanded at a point where there was a bridge over the river. It was an almost ideal position, having towards the river about 800 yards from the north-western face of the kopje a natural horseshoe-shaped parapet that seemed as if it had once formed part of some great line of Roman entrenchments. Water was handy and good, and the extent of the position was suitable to the numbers of the garrison. A branch line such as was actually constructed to the chosen camping ground could as easily have been brought to the place suggested. As for the entrenched camp itself, looking

at it one could not help wondering whether it had been laid out with the idea of being defended with flintlock muskets against Kaffirs armed with assegais. It had, for example, curious little circular bastions at the angles presumably intended to afford flank defence to the adjacent lines of low parapets. In the days of Marlborough these would have been quite useful. There is many a true word spoken in jest, and of such were the remarks of a "bluejacket" engaged in digging the trenches. A comrade inquired, "What are *you* doing, Bill?" The reply was, "Digging my bally grave." It struck me that if it should be the ill-fortune of the speaker to take part in the defence of the camp, it was far from improbable that this prediction might be fulfilled. For myself, I made up my mind that if Queenstown should be attacked I would evacuate the place, if possible, before it was too late.

A couple of days after my arrival it was my good fortune to witness the detraining of a detachment of the Cape Mounted Rifles, who formed a most valuable accession to our little force. I never saw a more workmanlike body of men; smart, active fellows in the prime of life, and evidently in a most satisfactory military condition. The discipline seemed to be excellent, and the men the quickest and most willing workers that it is possible to imagine. To see them detraining their horses and off-loading their stores and equipment was a positive treat. There were Kaffirs helping, and one might see two great brawny fellows taking gentle hold of a case and bearing it sedately

between them to its destination, whilst single riflemen simply chucked similar cases on their backs, ran with them, and were back again for others before the two blacks had deposited their first burden. The Cape Mounted Rifleman is a first-rate fighting man, and a downright good soldier all round. The corps has but one fault, so far as I could judge, and this is that the officers are in many cases far too old.

The inhabitants of Queenstown are Britishers of the British, and the people of other districts lying immediately south and east of it are similarly, for the most part, British and loyal to the core. But northwards, towards the Free State and Basutoland borders, the people are chiefly Dutch, and disloyal almost to a man. Two facts impress themselves upon the visitor to South Africa more and more as he gains, on the spot, greater knowledge of the subjects involved. The first is that the present war, and all the long series of troubles that have preceded it, is due entirely to the South African question having for so long been regarded and treated as a "Party" one in the British Parliament. My meaning will be understood by any who have read Mr. Spencer Wilkinson's little book, "British Policy in South Africa." The title of this brochure must have been selected in an ironical spirit, since what it most distinctly proves is that there never has been any such thing as a "British Policy in South Africa." The second fact is that the British Colonists and the British Afrikanders, be they English, Irish, Scotch, or Welsh, Conservatives, Liberals, or Radicals, are practically

unanimous in their dislike and contempt for the Party Politicians who have injured them, whilst at the same time they are filled with an enthusiastic loyalty to the Queen and to the Empire such as is seldom met with in any part of Great Britain herself. Imperialistic loyalty is the paramount sentiment amongst all the Britishers in this country. They have lived on and endured much for it in the past—and they have shown recently that as many of them as the Imperial Government would employ were willing to risk their lives for it.

For many years past the complaint has been that a Dutch, or at all events a Boer name is a necessary qualification for any public appointment in the Cape Colony. Similarly, in everyday life the "Bond" has so asserted itself that the Britisher has had to make the best of belonging to a practically unrepresented minority in a country nominally ruled by her Majesty the Queen-Empress. After the war, when the entire situation comes under review, our statesmen must look to it that the "equal rights for all men," which obviously represents the one thing especially needed for the future peace and prosperity of these territories, shall no longer be permitted to mean "all except the Britisher." It is obviously ridiculous that the loyal subjects of the Paramount Power should occupy a position in colonial affairs subordinate to that of the disloyal representatives of a hostile element within the Queen's dominions. A parallel may be drawn with the condition of affairs which even yet prevails to

some extent in Malta, where the mere fact of being a Britisher, or more especially a soldier, has furnished sufficient reason for being denied even a fair hearing in court, as a preliminary to receiving an unjust sentence. It may be a surprise to many to learn that the grievances of the Transvaal Uitlanders have exceeded those of many British colonists in the Cape territory only in so far that the latter have had votes which have nevertheless been useless to them. This was not formerly the case. The isolated British farmer amongst a crowd of Boers was, until after 1881, usually good friends with all—or, if otherwise, for personal, not national, reasons. The Boers were taught to despise the British, and in their ignorance have based their contempt upon a conception of our character that was not justified by the actual facts. This erroneous conception was not, however, any less pernicious in its effects than if it had been a veritable one, and the growth of the Afrikander Bond is not the least of the many evils that have been fostered by it. The origin and aims of the Afrikander Bond have been clearly explained by Mr. Theo. Schreiner.* The fact that this gentleman, who is a brother of the Premier, should, under the circumstances, have come forward to expose the conspiracy, gives even greater weight to his arguments than they must under any circumstances have commanded upon account of their remarkably able construction. Guilty the Afrikander Bond undeniably is, and the mere fact that a disloyal section has for long

* See Appendix, p. 285.

years been conspiring to overthrow British supremacy is sufficient to condemn the British Governments that have sat still with their hands folded until the canker has grown so deep-seated that a terrible operation has become necessary in order to eradicate it. A few years ago comparatively mild treatment would have sufficed.

The consequences of weakness and vacillation in the past have not only involved great loss of life and much ill-feeling during the war, but, in addition to this, numbers of her Majesty's loyal subjects in the Cape Colony and Natal are suffering losses which the compensation which it may be assumed will be given them, can never make good. The same thing applies to British farmers in the Orange Free State, but with the difference that, legally, at all events, they are not entitled to compensation. Morally, however, they have at least equal claims to favourable consideration.

Large numbers of colonial border farmers, and many also from the Free State, were daily arriving in Queenstown; and unless handsome compensation is hereafter awarded to them, the great majority must be ruined completely. It speaks volumes for the loyalty of these men that, in spite of the personal misfortunes entailed upon themselves, they were nevertheless unanimous in approving the straightforward determination of the British Government to prove itself the paramount Power. Many who were until recently rich men will find themselves obliged to resume the struggling existence of their earlier lives; but they console themselves

with the reflection that they will do so under different conditions to those of the last few years. At least they will be able to go about their work free from the insults and petty annoyances that they have hitherto so constantly experienced at the hands of their Boer neighbours. The tales told of personal encounters between Britons and Boers, more especially during the six months just before the war, would be amusing but for the shame that one feels in remembering the conditions that gave rise to them. The Boers have been in a position to treat the British as an inferior race, merely existing on sufferance in territories that did not rightfully belong to them, and from which they were soon to be ejected bag and baggage. The British farmer in Burghersdorp, Aliwal, Barkly East, and many other districts, has long been made to feel himself an Uitlander. To realize what has been the situation it is necessary to have heard it described by those who have been themselves subjected to its evils. The facts simply beggar description. Nor has Boer disloyalty been confined to the lower classes and to the politicians. Even the country magistrates have been implicated, and their administration of "justice" has been moulded accordingly.

On Tuesday evening, November 7, my mare Jess, and the "weagon," under charge of Arendse, arrived safely after an eventful journey of five days. All three of these valuable possessions appeared to have survived the ordeal without having sustained any damage, and the next day I commenced the education

of Jess by riding her about the camp, and thus getting her accustomed to troops. Soon afterwards I had opportunities of teaching her to stand fire, when Brabant's Horse commenced musketry practice. Nine horses out of ten can be made steady under fire if only they are taken the right way. The proper thing to do is to bring a horse gradually up to the firing point whilst the firing is going on, and to let him graze now and then as he advances. Eventually he will graze quietly when close alongside the men who are shooting. The same thing applies to artillery fire. Jess became perfect. I have several times sat on her back, with the reins on her neck, observing artillery fire through my glasses, within half a dozen yards of the flank of the battery engaged. Of hostile fire, unless at very close range, horses as a rule take very little notice, unless bullets actually pass close to their ears or strike the ground at their very feet. A shake of the head or a slight start is even then the most that is likely to result.

At this time it was a cause of general surprise that the Free State Boers still continued inactive. Beyond crossing the Orange River and raiding a few border farms, the enemy had as yet made no sign. The way lay open to them to advance when or where they chose. Not one single British or Colonial soldier was in position between Queenstown and De Aar, a distance of about 200 miles, so that, even if the Boers were not desirous of risking a fight, there was nothing to prevent them from invading our territory

with absolute impunity anywhere within this unguarded interval. Many reasons were suggested to account for this prolonged inactivity; but that which found most supporters was that the enemy feared complications with the Basutos. Certainly, had the Basutos risen against the Boers, the situation would have become extremely awkward. It would have been our duty to protect our enemies from our friends, and we should have been utterly powerless to do so. Fortunately, the suggested complication failed to arise, and the need for speculation as to the causes of Boer inactivity was removed by the long-expected invasion being actually commenced.

CHAPTER IV.

ARRIVAL OF SIR WILLIAM GATACRE.

THE commando which had for so long been lying inactive at Rouxville, crossed the Orange River on November 13, and occupied Aliwal North with 450 men and one gun. Commandant Olivier lost no time in issuing a proclamation declaring Aliwal and district to be Free State territory, and detailing the obligations and penalties attached to the performance or neglect of burgher and civic duties. The Transvaal and Free States flags were hoisted with due formality, and British subjects were given fourteen days' grace in which to swear allegiance to their new masters or quit the country. In actual fact, the fourteen days referred to represented a paper arrangement only, since in the case of all prominent citizens forty-eight hours appears to have been the period generally enforced, either by official notice or by private intimation that it would be wiser to clear forthwith.

The magistrate, Mr. Hugo, seems to have behaved exceedingly well, and, indeed, to have shown not only a strict regard for his duty, but also a courageous determination to brave all the risks that his conduct might

involve. Accordingly, he circulated notices calling a meeting of prominent loyalists, with the double purpose of discouraging the enemy by an expression of adverse opinion, and, secondly, of giving the farmers a chance of formally recording their choice in favour of the Imperial Government by a united decision to resist, by force, if necessary, any attempts to "commandeer" them for service with the invaders. This most excellent intention was frustrated by the shameful conduct of two Dutch "loyalists," one a member of Parliament and the other a justice of the peace. These gentlemen, who had hitherto been loud in their protestations of unswerving loyalty to the Crown, most shamefully betrayed the proposed meeting, which they themselves had promised to attend. Mr. Hugo was given two hours to clear out, and his assistant, Mr. Van Reenen, the same time. Both arrived at Queenstown on Friday, November 17. Mr. Hugo was obliged to leave his wife and children behind him and simply flee for his life. The English refugees, of whom I met many, were unanimous in their praise of Mr. Hugo, whose conduct they declared to have been most plucky. The magistrate's first adventure with the Boers was really a rather amusing one. It appears that the enemy had for a long time been firmly persuaded that Aliwal Bridge had been mined or otherwise prepared for destruction. In order, therefore, to frustrate any British intention of blowing them into the air along with the bridge, the astute burghers caused the magistrate and assistant-magistrate of Aliwal to stand in the roadway

in the centre of the bridge whilst the invaders defiled by them. The scene was much enjoyed by the Boers and by their sympathizers—more especially by the latter, who were invariably most malignant and insulting in their behaviour to the loyalists. These consist almost entirely of genuine Britishers. The colonists of Dutch extraction consisted, to the extent of one-half, of persons openly in favour of the enemy, whilst, of the other half, the majority were "sitting on the fence," and the small remainder were really loyal to the Crown, because they saw that the interests of South Africa at large could best be served by supporting British supremacy.

Mr. Hugo had hitherto been suspected of entertaining Afrikander tendencies, and there is no doubt that up to a certain point his countrymen commanded his sympathy. He deprecated every step that seemed likely to provoke a warlike solution of the South African question, and consequently performed his duties with less firmness than many people considered desirable. Perhaps in the past he may have been wrong, but, at all events, he made it perfectly clear that under the conditions that had since arisen his loyalty was beyond question. It would have been easy for Mr. Hugo to retire from Aliwal before the climax was reached, or, even remaining at his post to the last, to take his departure then without any specific demonstration of his opinions. By following either of these courses he could have avoided estranging himself from the Dutch or compromising his official relations

with the British. He seems, however, to have preferred acting precisely as might have been expected of him had he been an Englishman. The assistant magistrate, Mr. Van Reenen, has acted in similar fashion, standing loyally by his chief to the utmost extent of his power and opportunities. It should not be forgotten that, acting as they did, these two gentlemen made themselves liable, under Commandant Olivier's proclamation, to the penalty of death. The stand which they made was, therefore, specially meritorious.

The occupation of Aliwal was followed next day by that of Burghersdorp, the forces employed consisting of contingents from the Bethulie and Rouxville commandos, reinforced by not less than a hundred colonial Boers drawn from the Aliwal district. The rebel Boers adopted colours of their own—blue badges with a thin yellow stripe. The forward movement of the enemy was now temporarily arrested, for what reason no one seemed able to explain. Disturbing rumours from Basutoland were plentiful enough, and, if the half of the allegations made were true, there was quite sufficient to account for the delay. Upon the other hand, it is not impossible that the reconnaissances carried out with the armoured train may have led the enemy to imagine that strong forces were on the move from Queenstown to oppose them. Be the cause what it may, the fact remains that, although Stormberg Junction lay at the mercy of the Boers, they refrained for the time from occupying, or even approaching, that station. Scouts, indeed, were seen, but no signs of a commando.

The proper reply for us to have made to the occupation of Burghersdorp was obviously the re-occupation of Stormberg Junction, but no reinforcements having yet arrived, this proceeding was considered impossible. This was a most regrettable error. Reinforcements were already close at hand, and obviously it would have been a lighter task to relieve a garrison holding Stormberg against the enemy than to drive out a hostile force from the same position. However, we contented ourselves with blowing up a railway bridge about halfway between Stormberg and Burghersdorp.

On Wednesday, the 15th November, Major Maxwell, R.E., conducted a reconnaissance with the armoured train as far as the broken railway bridge, and kindly permitted me to accompany him. The train consisted of two trucks only, and conveyed a detachment of the Royal Berkshire Regiment under Lieutenant Gossett, together with sundry engineers and railway men. We saw no sign of the enemy with the exception of a single scout who was prowling about near the bridge and galloped quickly away as soon as he saw the train approaching. The men were much disappointed at the enemy's failure to put in an appearance. I was particularly struck by the quiet business-like conduct of the detachment, and had every confidence that, in case of a fight, they would give a good account of themselves. It was my good fortune to see the Berkshire men in action at Tofrek (NcNeill's zariba) in the Suakin campaign of 1885, and found the battalion in South Africa made of the same sterling stuff.

All our attention soon became fastened upon the absorbing question of when an advance would take place. General Gatacre arrived on the 18th with his staff and a portion of the Royal Irish Rifles, more troops being immediately expected. Delay seemed very dangerous, since it tended to encourage the colonial Boers to cast in their lot with the enemy. We heard, on good authority, that at Barkly East eight hundred colonials had gone into laager, but it was not known with absolute certainty even that such a laager had been formed; consequently rumours as to intended movements by the rebels were generally treated as untrustworthy. That something was doing in the Barkly district was clear, but the exact nature of the disturbance had not yet transpired. The departure of the Naval Brigade, who were withdrawn on Thursday (16th) to East London for embarkation to Cape Town *en route* for Modder River, was no doubt necessary, since otherwise it would scarcely have been permitted, but it is none the less most regrettable. With the reinforcement that he brought with him, and the Naval Brigade still at his disposal, General Gatacre might safely have advanced forthwith to Stormberg. The moral effect of leaving the invaders in undisturbed possession of Burghersdorp, and with no opposition to their further advance, was distinctly prejudicial to our interests.

With the arrival of the General and the battalion of Riflemen, the danger of an attack being delivered on Queenstown appeared to have vanished, and every one

felt easier. Sir William had most evidently lost none of that boundless activity which earned for him in Egypt the nickname of "Back-acher." From the moment of his arrival the General permitted no grass to grow under his feet, and was very much *en évidence.* He showed himself to the troops at church parade on Sunday, and in conclusion of a speech, in which he introduced himself in characteristic fashion, he communicated the good news of the highly successful action at Ladysmith on the Prince of Wales's birthday. He had thus an opportunity of making friends with the small body of troops that at the time represented his division, and he made the most of it. Cheerfulness at all times, and a spice of dry humour upon appropriate occasions, will always appeal to the soldier, and, although the men knew their future commander, by repute, to be a hard task-master, it was very evident that they unanimously elected him a popular favourite. Popularity will do much to ensure willingness and zeal in the execution of a stiff programme of work.

On Tuesday, November 21, Sir William Gatacre went by rail to the front to reconnoitre the position on Bushman's Hoek then occupied by the mounted company of the Kaffrarian Rifles, and said to be the appointed place of concentration for the Free State commandos about Burghersdorp, with their colonial adherents assembling in the district of Barkly East. The General also visited *en route* the camp at Sterkstroom where the bulk of the Kaffrarian Rifles under Major Cuming was stationed. The result of this

expedition was the despatch of the Royal Irish Rifles, the Berkshire Mounted Infantry, and the detachment of Cape Mounted Rifles to Putter's Kraal, about four miles south of Sterkstroom. The infantry proceeded by rail and the mounted troops by road, on Wednesday, the 22nd inst. The object of this movement seemed clear. The colonial rebels must fall foul of the force at Putter's Kraal if they marched direct on Bushman's Hoek, whilst, if they made a detour northwards in order to avoid contact, they must lose time in any case, and not improbably offer their flank to a timely attack before effecting a junction with the Free State commandos. The Bushman's Hoek position is one of great strength, and had it fallen into the hands of the enemy would have proved a most disagreeable obstacle to our advance. Moreover, the railway there climbs the hill by a winding track, in which are many works that would give great trouble to repair should the enemy be enabled to demolish them. The Kaffrarian Mounted Rifles were fairly well posted, and would assuredly have given a good account of themselves, but their numbers were insufficient for a prolonged resistance if stoutly assailed. The presence of the force at Putter's Kraal would however have enabled support to reach the Kaffrarians long before any great danger could have been incurred. The Cape Mounted Rifles had six 7-pounder screw guns and six Maxims. The force thus formed a compact little column of all arms, composed of excellent material. I noticed the excellent physique of the Royal Irish Rifles. During the night

following the departure of the troops for Putter's Kraal, Amphlett's and Dewar's companies of Mounted Infantry, about 280 strong, arrived from East London, and before many days had passed it was expected that quite a respectable force would have been assembled. Many people were clamouring for the immediate reoccupation of Stormberg as a prelude to offensive action against the invaders; but General Gatacre determined to await the arrival of further reinforcements, so as to ensure his being in a position to deliver a really hard blow.

Probably, had the General been able to foresee that only a portion of his division was destined to reach him, he would have acted as he was being urged to do. But under the actual circumstances the delay had necessarily a prejudicial effect upon our fortunes. Yet we must remember that we who criticize are "wise after the event." The general in war can but guide his course of action according to the information at his disposal and the situation as he finds it or believes it to be.

Refugees from the districts occupied by the invaders or threatened by colonial sympathizers kept arriving in great numbers, and many had suffered immense hardships. For example, one old couple who had secured an ox-wagon to convey them from Aliwal were compelled to walk, as the Boers ruthlessly commandeered the wagon. The wife of an Aliwal doctor, being unable to procure a conveyance of any sort, rode the whole one hundred and twenty miles, under the broiling sun and over execrable roads, on a bicycle. She

was subjected, moreover, to a shower of brutal and disgusting insults whilst passing a Boer commando on the road. Similar incidents appear to have been scandalously frequent.

There is just one satisfactory point to be noticed in relation to the invasion. The colonial Dutch were eager in their invitations to their kinsmen in the Free State, supposing that no more would be expected of them than that a general welcome should be accorded, and that a few young men should volunteer for service. Instead of this the luckless people found their allies ruthlessly "commandeering" in every district occupied, and the joys of rebellion very much modified in consequence. Other districts equally disaffected remained quiet, for no other reason than the knowledge that, if the inhabitants introduced the enemy, they themselves would be commandeered to serve in his ranks. The wire to Barkly East was cut on the 22nd inst., and we were without much information regarding the whereabouts or intentions of the colonial commando, but it seemed far from improbable that it might melt away without doing much. The fact that reinforcements were really arriving was becoming known, and Boer sympathies commenced to be regarded as distinctly dangerous if openly expressed. The meeting at Dordrecht held on Wednesday the 22nd, under the auspices of Mr. Sauer, passed a resolution in favour of remaining "loyal," but this "loyalty" expressed no more than discreet abstention from immediate co-operation with the invaders in the field.

Mr. Sauer left Dordrecht on Thursday with the intention of holding a meeting at Barkly and subsequently returning to Dordrecht in order to hold a second at that place. The Boers, who had by then occupied Barkly, declined to permit any meeting of real or pseudo-loyalists to be held.

Sir William Gatacre became ubiquitous from the day of his arrival, and the number of persons, places, localities and positions that he visited is quite wonderful. On the morning of the 23rd, however, he took what he regards as a rest. Having no expedition in view by road or rail, he mounted his horse at 4.45 a.m. and spent his time until 8 a.m. watching the troops at their exercises and inspecting various arrangements at the camp. On the 21st, when visiting the camps of Kaffrarian Rifles at Sterkstroom and Bushman's Hoek, the General paid some well-deserved compliments to that excellent corps and thereby pleased them greatly. Really the Kaffrarians had done plenty of hard work during the past three weeks, and they had, moreover, been exposed to no inconsiderable danger, holding the post of honour at the head of the division, and, until Thursday, being wholly unsupported by any other troops nearer than Queenstown.

It seemed very remarkable that, although the Boers had for ten days or more been within easy reach of Stormberg Junction, they had not yet taken possession of nor even made a dash to break up the railway. Some said that they were afraid of a "trap" having been set for them, but meanwhile we remained in possession

THE LATE CAPTAIN THE HON. RAYMOND H. L. J. DE MONTMORENCY, V.C., 21ST LANCERS, WHO RAISED AND LED "MONTMORENCY'S SCOUTS."

Killed at Schoeman's Kop, near Stormberg, February 23, 1900. He fired eleven shots at the enemy after having received his mortal wound.

[*To face p.* 34.

of the great advantage of an uninterrupted lateral communication with Lord Methuen's column on the Orange River. Late on the night of the 23rd a telegram arrived announcing the successful action at Belmont. From Natal we received scarcely any news whatever, and from this we concluded that there could be very little intelligence of a pleasant nature to be communicated. Nor, as the event proved, were we far wrong.

On the morning of the 28th I went out to see Brabant's Horse at work near the camp. Some were at drill and some at musketry practice. The progress already made quite astonished me. The men seemed to know what they were about, and thrust their untrained horses into their places with a skill that was really remarkable. Poor De Montmorency * was then the adjutant, and, judging by the results, both he and his predecessor—Collins of the Berkshires—had a great deal to be proud of. The shooting on the range was very good.

On my return to breakfast I found a telegram from my correspondent at Calla, telling me that a highly successful meeting of loyalists had taken place upon the previous day, and that a resolution had been passed by those present pledging themselves to refuse, at all costs, to be commandeered, and declaring themselves ready to take up arms against the invaders provided that troops were sent to support them.

* The late Captain the Hon. Raymond H. L. J. de Montmorency, V.C., 21st Lancers. Born February 5, 1867; killed at Schoeman's Kop, near Stormberg, February 23, 1900.

CHAPTER V.

BOERS OCCUPY STORMBERG: BRITISH CONCENTRATE AT PUTTER'S KRAAL.

On the 26th, intelligence of the occupation of Stormberg by the Boers came rather as a shock to every one. In the first place we had become so accustomed to talk about an early re-occupation of that position by our own troops, that we almost regarded it as a piece of deliberate rascality upon the part of the enemy that they should thus have anticipated us at the eleventh hour. Then, again, it was a great annoyance that this objectionable proceeding should have been carried out upon the very day when the English mail ought to have arrived. Had the Boers only been considerate enough to permit the mail train to pass through, albeit for the last time, we should then have accepted accomplished facts with reasonable complacency. But now the mail would have to return to Cape Town and thence be conveyed by sea to East London. In short, we should not now receive our letters for a fortnight, and this misfortune was clearly due to the bad manners of our friends the enemy. However, the long period of sitting still at Queenstown was now

brought to an abrupt termination. The 2nd Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers arrived at East London upon this same eventful day, and the General instantly determined to advance his headquarters to Putter's Kraal, to which place the Fusiliers were to be conveyed direct from the coast without any delay at Queenstown. On the 27th the General and Staff proceeded by rail to Putter's Kraal, and I set forth upon my first trek with the "weagon," Jess, and Arendse. I had bought a pair of good-sized horses from a Free State "refugee" at quite a reasonable price. "Kruger" was 15 hands 3 inches, and "Steyn" 15 hands 2½ inches—big horses for South Africa. Kruger showed signs of "quality" and could jump, but was rather a rough ride. Steyn was an excellent hack, but could not jump. However, these animals had been purchased to pull the "weagon," and pull it they did most gamely, as a rule, though Steyn was occasionally known to jib. This addition to the stud necessitated a further increase of the establishment in the form of another "boy." So "Arendse" discovered an idle, dirty, but quite well-intentioned half-breed, named "Cornelius," whose business henceforth was to see to the horses under the supervision of Arendse, whilst the latter did the cooking and such personal service as he was capable of, or which I insisted upon his attempting. Arendse eventually became quite a fair camp cook, and he had a virtue that gentlemen of colour alone possess—he could light a fire with a common wood match, in a gale of wind, and this although the fuel might be saturated with rain. He

had also a knack of finding firewood, eggs, milk, vegetables, etc., in all sorts of places where no one else had even thought of looking for them. He was a man of few words, as a rule; but judging by the tenour of his conversation, as I have occasionally overheard it, this was perhaps as well. His mastery of the English language was even too thorough. The failings of Cornelius, which were many and aggravating, had the invariable result of making Arendse blasphemously filthy as well as unusually fluent in his conversation. Upon one occasion, at least, he applied a shambok to Cornelius. The latter retaliated by taking an early opportunity of amputating the thin and effective portion of the instrument. I plead guilty to having, under severe provocation, kicked Cornelius. He was apparently accustomed to receiving personal chastisement as well as to deserving it. We halted for the night at Bailey, fourteen miles from Queenstown, and next morning continued to Putter's Kraal, eighteen miles. At Bailey I was told that a commando from Stormberg had marched towards Steynsburg, and I concluded that this probably portended an attempt to work round our left *viâ* Maraisburg and Tarkastad. Nothing of the kind was, however, attempted; why, it is hard to say. Certainly it is what the enemy ought to have done. But the Boer, as a rule, is not very enterprising. Had De Wet been at Stormberg there is little doubt that the movement suggested would have been made. On my arrival at Putter's Kraal I reported what I had heard to the Intelligence Officer, who had, however, also

heard the same report, and had interpreted the object of the enemy as I had done.

Meanwhile, the outpost at Bushman's Hoek had been reinforced with Imperial and Colonial mounted troops, and Major Cuming, with another company of his Kaffrarian Rifles, had also proceeded to the same place from Sterkstroom.

On the 29th I treked on to Sterkstroom, four miles, in order to have some small repairs done to the "weagon," which had suffered slightly in consequence of Steyn having exhibited a mixture of high spirits and ill-temper. The only blacksmith in the place was busy, and it proved impossible to get the job done the same evening. There was, therefore, nothing for it but to remain for the night. In the Kaffrarian Rifles I found an old friend in one of the subalterns, named Webber, who had been a private in the 2nd Volunteer Battalion of my regiment in the days when I was adjutant thereof. His uncle was the colour-sergeant of B Company, and possessed a very fine bass voice, which I have often heard, not only at the annual volunteer entertainments, but also at concerts, and upon other occasions. This meeting pleased me very much; but not so did my relations with another acquaintance—a ferocious-looking bulldog who discovered, as dogs do, that I was fond of dogs. This horrible beast was called "Bill," and was apparently imbued with the wholly false idea that he and I were most intimate friends. He followed me everywhere, and finally insisted upon accompanying me to

my room at the inn. "Bill" had quite engaging manners, but it seemed as if it might not be quite safe to quarrel with him. Yet I did not feel as if I wanted Bill in my room, more especially as I realized that his presence obtruded itself disagreeably, even when he was out of sight and hearing. I resorted to stratagem. I put on my hat, opened the door, walked out of the room and called him to follow. The enemy fell into the trap, and rushing joyfully past me clattered down the stairs. Upon which I ran back and shut the door. Thus we parted for the night. Bill scratched the door and himself for a short while, but eventually finding the passage a bit draughty no doubt, betook himself elsewhere.

Whilst I was thus engaged the General was at Molteno with a fatigue party removing grain and flour from the mills. This must have annoyed the enemy considerably, for they doubtless regarded the supplies in Molteno as their own perquisite.

On the morning of the 30th I trekked back to Putter's Kraal, and on arrival heard of Lord Methuen's desperate fight at Modder River. No details were given, except that the General himself had been wounded, and that the losses had been very heavy. Reinforcements for our own column were reported to be near at hand, but it had already transpired that the concentration of the 3rd Division, as originally constituted, could not take place for the present—a considerable proportion of the troops having been diverted to Natal.

Meanwhile, all sorts of rumours floated in the air.

We heard, upon what seemed to be perfectly reliable authority, that 3000 Transvaalers were marching south to join hands with the Free State and rebel commandos about Burghersdorp, etc., and that the intention of the enemy was to attack our advanced post on Bushman's Hoek, defended by mounted troops and Kaffrarian Rifles, numbering some 800 men in all. The distance in advance of Putter's Kraal camp is about twelve miles, and at Sterkstroom, four miles and a half from here, was an intermediate post defended by one company of Kaffrarian Rifles and 200 Brabant's Horse. Heliographic communication had been established in addition to the telegraph, so that ample warning could be given in the event of attack. Bushman's Hoek is a very strong and most important position. The railway to Stormberg here climbs over the pass by a series of snakelike curves, and during the ascent there are large numbers of comparatively heavy culverts, embankments, cuttings, etc., which would require much time and labour for their repair were the enemy permitted to injure them. Moreover, the main road to Stormberg passes also over Bushman's Hoek, so that the loss of our position thereon would have been a very serious matter. We hoped and believed that the defenders of the post on the Hoek, aided by counter-attacks delivered by the force here, might be able to maintain themselves, but a disaster seemed by no means impossible. Sir William Gatacre was powerless to assure anything whatever owing to the delay in supplying him with troops. His division was represented by two

battalions only; and one of these did not properly belong to it. We had no cavalry and no Royal Artillery. Of course, the diversion of early arrivals to Natal, and the later need of others for the Kimberley Relief Force, fully accounts for the disparity of reinforcements in this direction when compared with others; but it is difficult to explain why greater expedition in the despatch of troops from home was not displayed. The want of cavalry in particular was most grievously felt. It is not too much to say that if Lord Methuen had had, say, three regiments of cavalry at Belmont, the Boer army would have been so utterly routed that no further fighting would have taken place.

Late in the evening of December 1st I had a wire from Dordrecht telling me that a commando 1200 strong was marching on that place from Barkly. And upon the following morning the Boers were reported to have occupied the town with a commando estimated at 1200 strong. The distance from Sterkstroom to Dordrecht is only about thirty miles.

The news of the occupation proved to be true, but the commando numbered only 500 men, most of whom were rebels from the Barkly district. At the same time, all idea of attacking them fell through, since they had already gone towards Stormberg or Molteno. A gentleman, who was in Dordrecht at the time of its occupation, counted the numbers of the commando as it marched in. According to his account the Boers still seemed full of confidence. He had a long talk

with Mr. Munnik, the renegade ex-magistrate of Barkly East, but without gaining much information.

On December 4 I heard that the Cape Police had cleverly arrested two rebels named Anandale and Botha, whom they caught in the act of commandeering Dutch colonists, on Carnarvon Farm, only about fifteen miles from camp in the direction of Dordrecht. It is to be hoped that these rascals have since been made an example of, but meanwhile they were duly committed for trial by the magistrate at Sterkstroom and sent down to Queenstown.

The 74th and 77th Field Batteries and the 12th Field Company Royal Engineers arrived during the course of December 5, the two latter in the morning, but the former was not complete until late at night, although the horses and a small detachment reached the railway station shortly after midday. It appears that through some jumble on the railway, the train containing the men and equipment of the 74th Field Battery was delayed for nearly three hours within a short distance of its destination. Had not this delay occurred, the battery might easily have been settled down comfortably in camp before dark. The horses seem to have suffered considerably during the voyage. The fittings of the ship appear to have been hastily erected and without any regard for sanitation, so that before the battery artificers could complete the needful alterations no less than thirteen deaths resulted from pneumonia caused by the poisonous atmosphere between decks. The weather, most unfortunately, was such that the

"ports" required to be kept shut during the early part of the voyage, just when the ventilation which might have been supplied by them was most needed. In spite of all their troubles the horses are a splendid lot, and in a very few days they will be fit for work. On arrival very many—more especially the original battery animals—were much "tucked up," and their coats appeared to "stare" considerably. I was glad to find that at least one amongst the officers knows the Cape, so that one might look forward to seeing the horses turned out to graze on the veldt. There was little enough grass, it is true, but the luxury of a roll and a little freedom works marvels with horses that have had a bad time of it. The superior condition of the tram and omnibus horses serving with the batteries is obviously attributable to the fact that they had a better start coming out of hard work and plenty of good food. The 12th Company R.E. did very smart service during the afternoon by making two new "drifts" between camp and station, by which the previous congestion of traffic was entirely removed. The men stuck to their tasks most manfully under a broiling sun; no navvies could have surpassed them. Number 12 Company came out with a reputation, and seemed determined to increase it.

The divisional ammunition column arrived during the night; or rather the men, vehicles, horses, and part of the harness for the mules. The rest, we were told, would no doubt follow in course of time, as well as the Ordnance depôt of ammunition. The latter was an

urgent necessity. One such battle as Modder River would have exhausted all the available supply of artillery ammunition at hand. Whilst I was at the railway station watching the ammunition column preparing to march into camp I observed an amusing incident which deserves to be recorded. One of the drivers who had been entrusted with a sick horse in addition to an ex-tramcar animal, proceeded to mount the latter, regardless of the fact that it probably had not had a saddle on its back since it was a colt. The result was much kicking and rearing, combined with an obstinate determination to remain otherwise stationary. The man got angry, and, uttering a variety of anathemas, began to ply his spurs with vigour and intention. Just as the contest culminated, another driver standing by called out, "Stow them spurs, Jack; ring yer bloomin' bell!" This anecdote represents the light side of the picture, but there was also a serious aspect that might not impossibly force itself into notice. Here we had batteries sent to the seat of war with 50 per cent. of their strength composed of "registered horses" not half a dozen of whom had ever been worked on the "ride and drive" system. Thus, in addition to needing gentle exercise and nursing after their voyage, the remounts required also a complete course of training in artillery draught. It might be supposed that batteries which left England on November 2 would have received their reserve horses soon enough to have had time to do some little training previously to embarkation; and yet most of these horses were not actually

received until two days before going on board ship. This is a very rough country, and consequently the horses drawing the guns need to be especially well trained in order to give the batteries the desired mobility.

There was a small field day early in the morning in which two battalions and the mounted infantry were engaged. I was sorry that I was unable to be present —being at the railway station—more especially as I should have liked to see whether, under the eye of the General himself, greater attention would be paid to the "use of ground" than I had hitherto been accustomed to see or read of in relation to the present campaign.

The following is taken *verbatim* from my letter published in the *Times* of January 2:—

"In all the battles fought it would seem, so far as we can understand from the meagre narratives, that the Boers, having been found occupying a position, the preparatory fire of artillery has been followed by purely frontal attacks delivered right on the position and without any attempts to turn or threaten the enemy's line by the occupation of adjacent positions towards his flanks or rear. There are very few positions in South Africa that are not of the class that tempts the intending defender to spread more and more to the flanks because this or that point is just the one thing needful to ensure perfection. And as each is successively included, another ridge or knoll appears in view and is found equally tempting.

Finally, the defender is obviously obliged to content himself with an extent of front suitable more or less to the strength of his force, and the further points are necessarily left unoccupied. In my opinion the time required for the artillery preparation should be employed by the assailant in effectively occupying one or more of the positions reasonably adjacent to that of the enemy, and not until these *pieds-à-terre* have been secured should one single man of the force be seriously committed to the attack, or much less to the assault of the position itself. Quite apart from the special case of the Boers, I do not think that any assault can succeed against modern rifles except at an awful cost to the attackers, unless the point assaulted is kept under effective fire until the assailants reach charging distance of it. Such a fire cannot be maintained as a rule by adjacent units, and scarcely ever by those in rear—not even by artillery. Consequently a 'fire-position' nearly perpendicular to the line of advance is required, and this will generally mean in prolongation of the enemy's position. In any case the advance to the attack should consist in the successive occupation of various fire-positions, the occupants of which can, by their fire, favour the advance of their comrades to others at closer ranges. The advance of a 'general line' is perhaps the 'road to Paradise,' but it is not the way to victory. To seize something with the right hand, something else with the left, and then more with the teeth—and *da capo*, or with variations—is the method by which an assailant can approach and finally

assault an enemy in position. 'General lines' look pretty at drill, but cannot and should not be preserved on the field of battle. We need to think of the ground itself, not of the lines we place upon it. The officer, be he of high or inferior rank, who can best turn to account the advantages offered by the ground for the use of the men under his command is the best fighting officer. Until the attackers come under effective fire the retention of power to manœuvre, or, in other words, the preservation of order, is the chief consideration; but afterwards the occupation of successive tactical points by whatever troops may be able to seize them is everything, and the rest comparatively nothing. The combination of order with the quick grasping of local opportunities is so seldom feasible, if ever, that it is scarcely worth while to discuss means intended to secure it.

"I have to-day heard a whisper that the General may be moved against his will to take early action. That much pressure is being brought to bear upon him by certain ignorant civilians is, I know, the case. But I trust that he will stand firm and postpone his advance until his mounted troops are really fit for service, even if he does not await further reinforcements to his infantry. There is little use in striking until he is in a position to strike hard and drive the blow well home. The delay, of course, is causing great local inconvenience and loss of property, besides encouraging the rebellious section to declare openly for the enemy. Yet the accession of a few hundred extra colonials to the enemy's

forces can, in the end, have but little effect upon the issue that will soon be decided. However, I think it by no means impossible that we may march on Friday or Saturday next, but I still hope that we may wait until Monday."

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORMBERG DISASTER.

I THINK that in telling the story of Stormberg I cannot do better than to give my original letter to the *Times* exactly as it was written, and explain and correct by means of notes anything that seems to require explanation or amendment.

"Putter's Kraal, December 7.

"The move forward is at last at hand. A strong column will leave here by rail to-morrow evening, and, having detrained north of Molteno, march on to the Boer laager at Stormberg, which it is proposed to rush with the bayonet at 3.30 a.m. on Saturday. Only one field battery * is to proceed with the troops, and this, having selected horses, is to be also conveyed by rail. The distance is about twenty-five miles, and would be far too much for horses only just off the ship, and General Gatacre has wisely decided against overtaxing

* This arrangement was most providentially altered, and two batteries, the 74th and 77th, under Majors Macleod and Perceval, were present at the fight. Had only one battery been taken with the column, it is probable that the whole would have been destroyed or taken prisoners.

their strength by such a march. Every one is to go as lightly equipped as possible, the baggage being left to follow the column later on. Sir William has most kindly arranged to have the horses of the newspaper correspondents conveyed with the train that carries the Headquarter Staff, so that it will be our own fault if we are unable to gain a fair idea of what takes place. To attempt such an enterprise on foot is of but little use, since a pedestrian with his limited powers of locomotion cannot cover a sufficiently wide area to gain a comprehensive view of operations upon even a reasonably large scale. We shall have somewhere about 2500 of all ranks, including two and a half battalions * (less details), mounted infantry and artillery. It is a thousand pities that, owing to the delay in sending him reinforcements, the General is not in a position to do as he would have much preferred—make a decided move with the intention of sweeping the enemy right over the frontier by a continuous advance. But even what is about to be attempted must, if successful, be attended by very important results. The line to De Aar will be reopened within a few days, and the petty commandos in the Dordrecht and Barkly districts will be obliged to fall back as the only alternative to being destroyed in detail. A concentration of the enemy about Burghersdorp and a subsequent fight in that neighbourhood, probably at Albert Junction, may be expected to follow the Stormberg engagement. At all events, the immediate concentration of the enemy

* Only two battalions were actually employed.

is a certainty; but there is, of course, a chance that his combined strength may be too great for us to tackle with the troops at present available; in which case we shall be obliged to await the arrival of reinforcements. Such delay, if it occurs, will be most regrettable, since much moral effect will thus be lost.

"December 8.

"The move northwards has been postponed until to-morrow, the reason being, I believe, that after further consideration it has been decided that an earlier start than that arranged for to-day will be necessary in order to reach the enemy's position before break of day. Under present arrangements, therefore, we shall leave here about the middle of the day to-morrow. The 16th Field Hospital, under Major Lilley, R.A.M.C., only arrived in camp yesterday, and although fully efficient in every way, yet I imagine that a start off to fight a battle on the very same evening would have been a somewhat severe test.

"December 12.

"I have had neither time nor opportunity to write more until now, and the task before me is a very difficult one.

"General Gatacre had under his command in this district only three and a half battalions,* two batteries field artillery, and some 850 mounted infantry and volunteer horsemen. The Colonial Boers were joining the enemy in considerable numbers, and it appeared

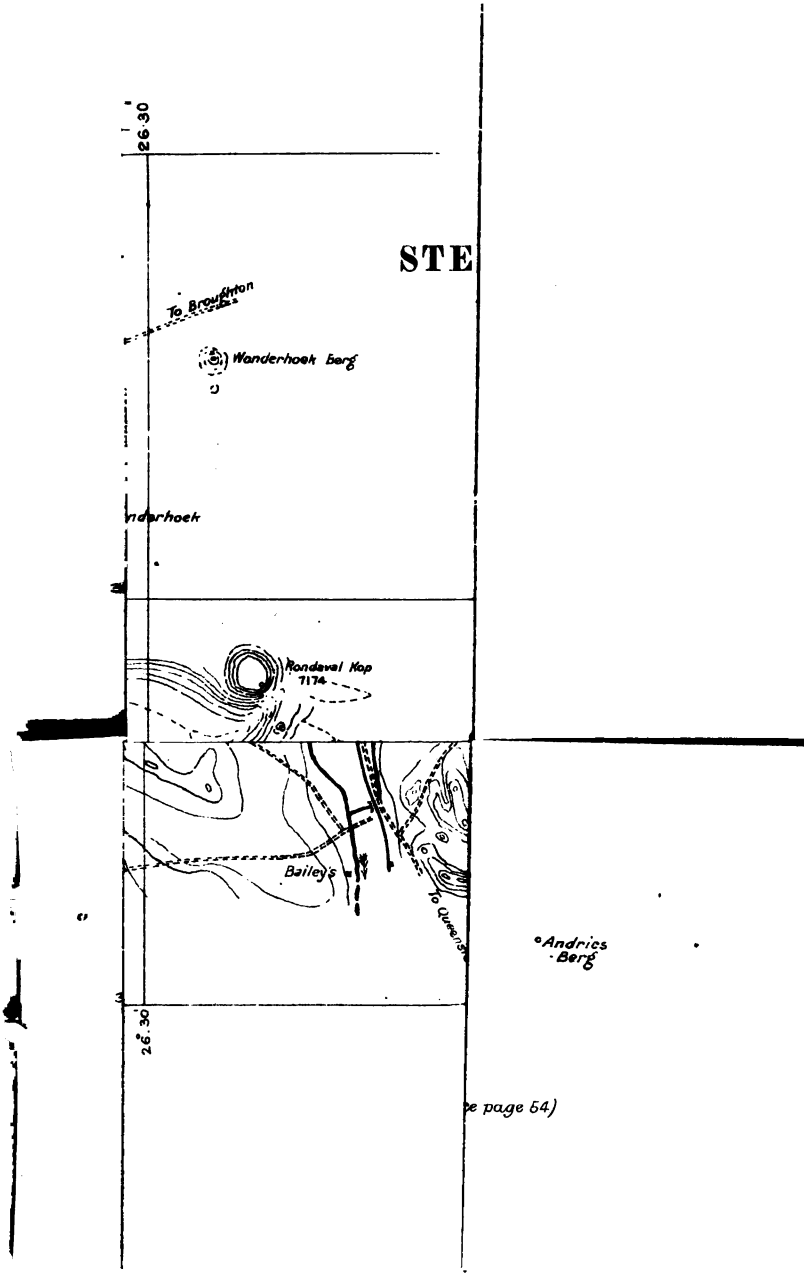
* 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, 1st Royal Scots, and four companies 2nd Royal Berkshire.

very needful to strike a blow that would have sufficient influence to check the stream of rebellion. Stormberg Junction had been occupied by the enemy, who had thus cut the lateral communications by rail and telegraph with the British forces under Lord Methuen and General French to the westward. At first sight it may appear as if all Sir William Gatacre needed to do was to move forward his troops north of Molteno to a position of observation threatening Stormberg, and by so doing, even if obliged to delay an attack upon the Boers at that place, overawe the disaffected. But inactivity after a forward movement will generally, and rightly, be interpreted as a confession of inability to proceed further, and such, pending the arrival of reinforcements, would have been the actual condition of affairs. Moreover, with the forces at his disposal, the General was not strong enough to maintain himself in the vicinity of the enemy and also to guard his own communications. Something therefore needed most urgently to be done, and Sir William elected to adopt a bold course. Accordingly he arranged for a sudden swoop by rail upon Molteno from Putter's Kraal, followed by a night march and an attack at dawn upon the enemy's position. That the enterprise involved extreme risk, and that such an attack upon a difficult position that had not been properly reconnoitred by efficient staff officers is against the principles of war, it would be idle to deny. Yet there are occasions when the true instinct of a commander leads him to disregard all rules and accept the risks that his conduct may

entail upon him. The whole question turns upon the value of the advantages consequent on success in comparison with the losses that may be incurred in case of failure. General Gatacre was quite aware that he might incur disaster, but he considered it his duty to face the risks before him without regard for his own reputation or any other considerations except the immense gains to the British cause that would assuredly accrue in the event of victory.

"I am fully persuaded that the decision to carry the Stormberg position by a *coup de main* was justified by the circumstances under which it was arrived at. Certainly, had the enterprise proved successful, no one who attempted to pass hostile criticism upon the victorious General could have obtained so much as a hearing. The actual failure was due to a variety of accidents, some of which, it is true, were not unavoidable.

"Stormberg Junction, at the foot of the 'Rooi Kop,' a considerable mountain overlooking the station, is situated about nine miles to the north of Molteno, the magnetic bearing being 356°. The Rooi Kop has its greatest length east and west, and to the north-west, west, and south-west of it were the Boer positions and the scene of the fight. The intention of the General was to fall upon the south-western portion of the Boer defences by inclining somewhat to the westward and then coming up in a north-easterly direction upon the right front of the enemy. In the event—owing, no doubt, to some extent, to the darkness—the guide at


26·30
STE
To Broughton
Wanderhoek Berg
nderhoek
Rondavel Kop
7174
Bailey's
To Queens
Andries
Berg
26·30

e page 54)

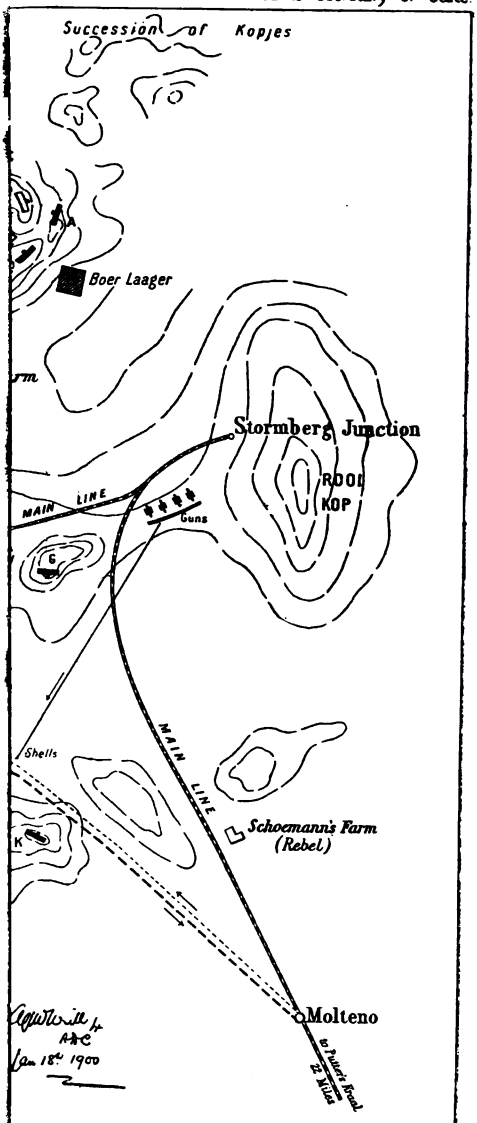
the head of the column lost his way, with the result that the force made a wide detour to the westward, circling completely round until, returning from the north-west, it struck the right rear in place of the right front of the enemy.

"Owing to various delays upon the railway, the start from Molteno took place two hours later than had been intended, and this fact, added to the immense increase in the length of the march, deprived our troops of the aid which the moon would otherwise have afforded upon the road to their halting-place, and further, which was even more detrimental, necessitated their subsequent advance against the enemy being proceeded with after only one hour's rest instead of three. The infantry had been at work, or in the train in open trucks, or marching since 4 a.m. on Saturday morning. The actual march occupied seven hours, and it is, therefore, little to be wondered at that the men were wholly incapable of making a supreme effort when at last they were surprised by receiving fire at short range whilst marching in fours in fancied security. On receiving the enemy's fire the companies at hand rushed at once against the kopjes from which it proceeded, and, advancing from boulder to boulder, swiftly commenced to ascend. Indeed, it is the fact that a considerable number actually reached within a few yards of a lower line of 'scanses' which could not, however, be reached without ladders. But at this juncture our own artillery, failing in the yet uncertain light to observe the ascent of the infantry, opened fire upon the enemy, and several

shells falling short dealt destruction amongst the assailants of the position. A partial retirement instantly ensued, and, having been brought to a standstill, the attack gradually melted away until, convinced that the case was hopeless, the General gave the order to retire. Had the order been promptly obeyed the troops might not improbably have been withdrawn without very serious loss, and a fresh attempt might even yet have been successfully prosecuted. But it was not to be. Many men were loth to retire because they were anxious to go on, whilst not a few were so utterly exhausted that they simply preferred to stay where they were, at all hazards, than to undertake the ordeal of a rapid retirement over the open ground at the foot of the hills. Eventually over 500 * unwounded men were taken prisoners. Steadily, as if on parade, the retirement was executed by those who responded to the order, the soldiers moving back at a steady pace, without the least hurry or confusion, and halting constantly to fire. As an example of rear-guard skirmishing, the performances of the Northumberland Fusiliers and Irish Rifles could scarcely have been surpassed. Disputing every inch of ground, the survivors of the ill-fated attack finally gained a line of low hills, which formed a horseshoe about 1500 yards west of the scene of their repulse, and from which the road by which the column had advanced shortly before was within easy reach. It was indeed fortunate that this most excellent rallying position was at hand.

* The number was actually about 600.

1900 from G. O. C South Africa to Secretary of State.



Zincographed at the Intell. Div. W. O. March 1900.

[To face p. 56.

Whilst a sufficient portion lined the crests and easily kept the enemy back, the remainder were re-formed in rear. Then, finally, when all hope of collecting more men had to be abandoned, the General gave orders for the retreat upon Molteno.

"Fortunate, indeed, was it that at the last moment, before leaving Putter's Kraal, Sir William decided to take both batteries of artillery in place of only one. Had there been but one battery, the entire force must have fallen into the hands of the enemy. Never were batteries more skilfully handled. Retiring alternately from position to position, the gunners splendidly atoned for the mischance of the earlier morning. The courage and steadiness of all ranks in the 74th and 77th Field Batteries undeniably saved the remnant of the infantry and themselves also from destruction or capture. Even as it was, had the enemy shown the very least enterprise, the situation must soon have become desperate. The mounted troops, too, vied with the artillery in their unflagging energy and devotion, but all would have been unavailing had the enemy pursued his advantages with courage and average common sense. Our line of retreat lay round the circumference of a circle of which the enemy held the centre, so that from first to last the Boers possessed the advantage of working on interior lines. Their heavy guns, themselves in complete security upon account of their superior range, swept the plains over which the tired troops were wearily plodding. The fire was beautifully directed but fortunately harmless, owing to the shells being

nearly all plugged. Bursts were quite the exception. Be all this as it may, it is at least certain that before many miles had been traversed in retreat stragglers were the rule and formed bodies the exception. Amongst the latter a party of the Royal Irish Rifles was most skilfully directed and kept well in hand by the adjutant, Lieutenant Sitwell, whose behaviour was distinctly conspicuous. I am certain that, say, five miles from Molteno, 300 average good men could easily have rolled up the entire column—all that was needed was to head it and swallow it by driblets as it came along.

"So far as I can understand the matter, the causes to which this most lamentable failure must be attributed are as follows:—

"(1) The map of the ground was utterly misleading, and worse than useless.* Not only was the contouring so incorrect as to give a totally false picture of the configuration of the hills, but the actual distances and the roads were inaccurately represented.

"(2) So far as I am aware, no one amongst the responsible authorities had taken any compass bearings, and consequently no one knew where he was being taken in the dark. A knowledge of the general direction in which it was intended to proceed, and occasional reference to the compass, would have sufficed to disclose the fact that the guide completely boxed the western half of the compass-dial—concluding with a straight

* The map was a bad one, but this condemnation of it, written at a time of keen disappointment, is slightly exaggerated.

shot at the needle-axis—instead of keeping a line pointing a few degrees west of north.*

"(3) The Berkshire regiment, by whom the redoubts now occupied by the Boers at Stormberg had been built, and to whom every inch of the ground was familiar, were left at Queenstown instead of being employed to recapture the works which they had so unwillingly evacuated about a month previously. The consequence of no one knowing where he was going or what he had to attack, or when proximity to the enemy had been reached, was that the infantry, marching in fours, were suddenly fired into at a point where, after ascending but a few feet, their further advance against the enemy was precluded by an unclimbable precipice. The moment that the first shots were fired, companies

* Note by the editor of the *Times*, printed with the original letter:—"Our special correspondent at Cape Town, in forwarding this account of General Gatacre's repulse, makes the following interesting comment: 'Your correspondent with General Gatacre, I think, exaggerates this point. Owing to the abundance of magnetic ironstone all over South Africa (and the name "Rooi-kop," "red-head," probably indicates its presence near Stormberg) compass bearings are liable to be all over the place, especially at night, when it is impossible to know how near one may be to magnetic rocks. At Chieveley one day I was taking some bearings which made Colenso lie due east instead of north, north for the nonce happening to be a large stone a yard or two away.'"

This objection does not hold good. Compass errors, occasioned by local influences, are always so great, and moreover so variable, that with ordinary care it should be impossible to be deceived by them. To check a compass, it is only needful to take a bearing, advance straight to an intermediate point, and then take a second bearing. If the two agree the compass is unaffected, and may be relied upon. Be this as it may, I had a compass bearing upon the night in question, and found it particularly useful.

doubled straight at the points whence the firing seemed to have proceeded, and commenced to scale the hill. Soon, however, they came upon a perpendicular wall of rock, from the summit of which the Boers were plying their rifles at half a dozen yards' distance. Here fell Lieut.-Colonel Eager,* and close to him Major Seton, of the Royal Irish Rifles. Colonel Eager was the man who reached the highest point attained by any of the attackers, and was then shot down, where many another British officer has fallen before now, at the head of his battalion, gallantly leading them as in the days of old when long-range weapons had not been invented.

"(4) Over five hundred men, afterwards made prisoners, had fallen into a trap from which they failed to extricate themselves. Consequently, when the rest of the force had been rallied upon a defensive position in rear, the General had not forces sufficient to warrant a fresh attempt upon some selected point of attack.

"(5) In any case the men, who had been by this time on the move for over twenty-four hours on the stretch, who had just completed seven hours' marching through the night, and who had been actually under arms for

* Lieut.-Colonel Eager was carried in a fearfully shattered state to the farm of a colonial Boer named Van Zyl, where he was put to bed, and the surgeon attended to him. Scarcely had this been completed when the wretch, Van Zyl, came home and insisted upon the sufferer being instantly removed. In vain the doctor pleaded that this would endanger his patient's life. The wounded officer was conveyed to Stormberg and Burghersdorp in an ox-wagon. He died, subsequently, in the hospital; not impossibly in consequence of this inhuman treatment, although he actually lived for several weeks.

upwards of sixteen hours, were so dead beat that severe hill-fighting was quite beyond their powers. During the actual retirement from the hills attacked—or rather under which we were ourselves attacked in anticipation—men were falling asleep in the open ground, under fire, after or before using their rifles. No sooner did they halt to fire than they fell forward sound asleep. An officer told me that he awoke several such men by kicking them soundly, and thus insisted upon their continuing their retreat to a place of safety.

"(6) The guns were at first in the same trap as the infantry, and were compelled to retreat some distance over very difficult ground before they could come into action upon, even then, a poor position, with most inferior command. During this movement a gun was lost * in consequence of being stuck fast and the struggling horses shot down by the enemy. It was a pitiable sight, of which those who saw it cannot speak without emotion.

"Finally, to state the case in brief. The position to be attacked had not been reconnoitred by any of those to be engaged against it, and even its exact situation was unknown to any of them. The information supplied by the Intelligence Department was complete and accurate, but owing to the misdirection of the march its value was thrown away. The distance to be marched was nearly doubled. The start was two

* The breech-block of this gun was removed and placed on an ammunition wagon. Later on, whilst the drivers of the wagon were assisting their battery during the passage of a drift, the horses stampeded, and the whole concern fell into the hands of the enemy.

hours late, so that the moon set long before the journey had been completed to an intermediate halting-place, and the men lost the rest that they so much needed. Day broke without the point of attack having been reached, and at the time when the enemy opened fire the column was unsuspiciously 'route marching.' Both battalions were winding along the foot of the hill and were fired upon simultaneously; both consequently became at once engaged in a skirmishers' fight, so that there remained no formed body of troops to interpose by any deliberate action in accordance with any fixed idea.

"Defeat in such circumstances was the natural consequence. The only marvel is that the force escaped annihilation; certainly but for the good work done by the artillery and by the mounted troops, not one man could have reached Molteno, although the shooting of the Boer riflemen was contemptible in the extreme. Worse shooting in action than that of the Boers in the Stormberg engagement has, perhaps, never been seen in war. Moreover, the failure of the enemy to make any determined attempt to cut off the straggling procession of worn-out troops denotes either strange want of confidence or incompetence. That we should have been beaten by such an enemy renders our case the more deplorable. Our retreat was molested merely by 'snipers.' Upon the other hand, the Boer artillery practice was splendid. They had no field artillery, and apparently not more than two mobile guns. Some say that they had but two guns in all, including the

40-pounder in a fixed position. Yet they succeeded in teaching most of us what it is like to come under a well-directed shell fire. Luckily, however, we had our instruction at small cost to ourselves, since few of the Boer shells burst. This was, no doubt, a cause of disappointment to their gunners—but not to us.

"It was, I think, a pity that the two companies of the Royal Scots and the 12th Company R.E., who remained in Molteno, were not ordered out to cover the retirement of the troops. The occupation of one very awkward position about three miles from Molteno by fresh troops was most desirable.* Had the Boers been enterprising and made use of this position, we should have been cut off when actually in sight of our goal.

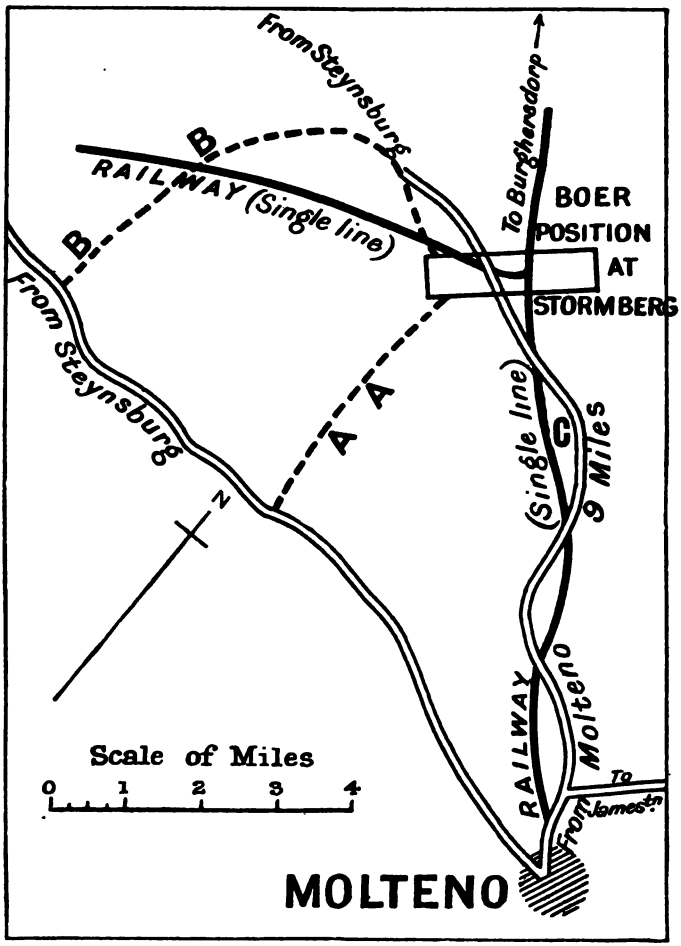
"Sterkstroom, December 13.

"I omitted to mention that the armoured train which advanced towards Stormberg from Molteno had a narrow escape. The Boers had laid a pretty little trap by partially removing fish-plates and getting ready a big gun to open on the train as soon as it got into difficulties. The sharp eyes of those in the train were, however, destined to perceive the trick, and a halt in time saved the situation. No sooner had the train come to a standstill than the gun opened fire, the range evidently having been measured since the first

* In justice to Major Birbeck, the senior officer of the Royal Scots, it should be explained that he fully realized the situation, and requested permission to march out with his two companies in order to hold the position referred to—but was refused.

shot was pretty close, and the second and third within a few feet. The range was about 7000 yards. Lieutenant Gosset did not wait for more. Forty-pounder shells cannot be digested, even by armoured trains.

"It should also be noted, in order to show how early in the proceedings misfortunes commenced to befall, that the field hospital, bearer company, maxim gun of Royal Irish Rifles, with sundry ammunition wagons and other vehicles, lost the column at the very start, and pursued the direct road to Stormberg, upon which they bivouacked at the point C, shown on the accompanying rough plan. At dawn, this detachment, guided by a native policeman, moved round to the west, and eventually rejoined the column during its retreat. Until this reunion took place, the troops were absolutely without any hospital or ambulance."



FROM THE PLAN WHICH ACCOMPANIED THE AUTHOR'S LETTER TO THE "TIMES."

[*To face p.* 64.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORMBERG DISASTER: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.

"Sterkstroom, December 13.

"SINCE concluding my letter, this afternoon, in which I endeavoured to describe and to some extent account for the disaster which we have experienced, it has occurred to me that a narrative of my own adventures during the eventful 10th of December, and the night of the 9th, might be interesting to some of your readers. The infantry marched off at 9.15 p.m., and, as we were unwilling to give our horses unnecessary fatigue by a long march at infantry pace, two other correspondents * and myself waited half an hour with the intention of accompanying the artillery. The latter, however, not being ready to move so soon as we had expected, we followed after the infantry, whom we supposed to have proceeded by the Stormberg road, which runs in a northerly direction from the town of Molteno. We did not hurry ourselves, but rode at a leisurely pace, making about five miles an hour. At the end of a little more than an hour and a quarter we began to

* My assistant, Mr. Hallimond, and Mr. Adams of the Exchange Telegraph Company.

wonder why we had not overtaken the column, and shortly after one of us dismounted, lit a match, and examined the road in search of footprints. There was no fresh 'spoor' whatever, of horse or foot, except the tracks of one cart; all else was quite stale. What, then, were we to do? That we were on the direct road to Stormberg was certain, and also that this road was the one which we had been informed would be used by the column. Naturally, we concluded the infantry must have moved off the road by some Kaffir path which we had failed to notice. After a brief consultation we decided to return and meet the artillery; and this we did in some haste lest they also might perhaps elude us. At the end of about two miles we heard wheels, and, supposing the sound to herald the approach of those whom we sought, we halted and dismounted to await their arrival. To our surprise the supposed artillery turned out to be the hospital and bearer company, with sundry ammunition wagons, a Maxim gun, and other odds and ends. At the head of this conglomeration rode Colonel Edge, R.A.M.C., to whom I addressed myself. He had been ordered, he told me, to 'follow the artillery,' and he was naturally astonished when I explained to him that he was actually following nobody. At this juncture there arrived two sergeants of the Cape Mounted Police, who were likewise under the impression that they were following the detachment of their own corps. From these we learned that the nearest Boer laager was about two miles beyond the point from which we three

correspondents had just returned. The time was now 11.30 p.m.

"After a consultation it was agreed that we should ride back to Molteno and report to Lieut.-Colonel Waters, D.A.A.G., who had been left in command, and from him learn what was to be done. It was at least obvious either that the column had taken the wrong road or else that the detachment which we had encountered had lost its way. The moon had now set, and we could not ride very fast. However, at the best pace that we could muster we hurried back to Molteno, the police who accompanied us examining the tracks they knew of, so as to detect the spoor of the column in case it had anywhere left the road. Our impression, however, was that the troops must have taken the Steynsburg* road direct from Molteno, and this we eventually found was the case. It may here be mentioned that Molteno is generally placed wrong on the maps of South Africa. It is the first station south of Stormberg Junction, from which it is nine miles distant. Having arrived at Molteno Station, we speedily roused Colonel Waters and explained the situation. One of the chief *employés* of the Intelligence Department was present, and he assured the colonel, from our description of where we had been, that the detachment was on the

* This was our view, but not that of the police. The latter, knowing the country, were of opinion that the force had inclined eastwards not westwards, for the reason that the east side of Stormberg offered the least difficult line of attack. This reasoning was absolutely sound, but as regards the direction taken by the column the police were of course mistaken.

right road. Naturally, therefore, Colonel Waters could do no more than request us to tell Colonel Edge to proceed. In short, the officer left in command at Molteno was not aware, nor was his civilian assistant in the Intelligence branch, that the general had changed his plans and elected to march by the westerly route.

"We felt very small and very much annoyed. We had deliberately undertaken a task which involved adding twelve miles or more to our night's journey—for nothing—and, what was worse, we had no idea where to find General Gatacre's troops. However, there was nothing for it but to return to Colonel Edge, as we had promised, so away we went. Within a mile and a half we met the entire detachment marching back towards Molteno! Colonel Edge and those with him, instead of remaining where they were until we returned, had decided that they must clearly be on the wrong road, and they preferred therefore to anticipate the order to return which they expected us to bring. This gave the wretched mules an extra six to seven miles' work. Once more the column reversed and set out for the second time towards Stormberg.

"Leaving the wagons to follow at their own pace, we trotted forwards, accompanied by the policemen as a sort of advanced guard. Just before we reached the furthest point to which we had attained on the previous occasion we heard wheels and voices from the westward, and, riding up, found one white and four black policemen with two mule wagons, one of which carried the reserve ammunition of the Northumberland Fusiliers.

In answer to our inquiries, the constable, who did not strike me as an intelligent man, stated that he had lost the column in the dark and had struck across the veldt so as to find the main road—and, in short, here he was.

"The time was now 2.30 a.m., and it was decided to wait where we were until dawn. The drivers of the wagons were told to outspan and feed their mules.* At 3.45 we got ready our horses, and, accompanied by the police, cantered forward to reconnoitre. The police sergeants went to the westward, whilst the three correspondents and four blacks went east at first, and then, working gradually north and west, on hearing the firing to our left front, we cautiously approached the Boer positions amongst the kopjes west of Stormberg. By 4.30 we had clearly located the scene of the fighting, upon which I sent back one of the blacks who knew the road to tell Colonel Edge what we had discovered, and to guide the lost detachment into the region where its various contingents would find their proper spheres of usefulness. The black faithfully and successfully performed his task, and consequently the wounded men

* The hospital and other mules were not outspanned, but only those of the two wagons just mentioned. A staff officer who had, like the rest, lost the main body in the dark, had meanwhile joined Colonel Edge, and declined to permit this very necessary rest being given to the animals. His reason was that we might be attacked. In vain I pointed out that in such a case the wagons would be captured no matter what he did, and that even supposing a few minutes might make the difference, it was better to risk this than to make a certainty that the mules should be unfit for work during the coming day. Nor was this all. There was an excellent opportunity to water the animals after daybreak, but it was neglected—with the usual results.

eventually had one ambulance, otherwise there would have been none. A civilian, whose name I regret having forgotten, drove out with a Cape cart from Molteno and did excellent service, disregarding his own safety and deliberately remaining for many hours under shell-fire conveying wounded men from the rear.

"But to return to my story. Having duly sent off the black to Colonel Edge, we continued upon our way, winding in and out amongst the kopjes opposite to those along which we could see the Boers hurrying along towards the scene of the fight. So intent were they upon this that they disregarded or failed to see us. At all events, we were only once fired at throughout our progress from opposite the centre of their position until we passed round the western flank, and there joined the right of Gatacre's troops on the defensive position to which we had observed them retiring. Up to this point we had no reason to suppose that any greater evil had happened than that the attack had failed. For this we were in a measure prepared, as the firing had not commenced until after daylight and had not been very heavy. We therefore supposed that, having arrived late, our people had found the enemy wide awake, and had merely done some little skirmishing in order to disengage themselves. The regular and leisurely mode of retirement which we had observed naturally encouraged us in this belief. As I stood under shelter of a friendly boulder on top of a convenient kopje watching the retirement, I almost forgot

my disappointment at the failure which it indicated in my admiration for the manner in which it was being carried out.

"A few hundred yards before we reached the right of our firing line on the ridge of low kopjes where the defensive position had been taken up, we met Lieutenant Radcliffe's * section of Captain Amphlett's company of mounted infantry galloping forward to seize a favourable covering position further to the right of the British force. This proved an excellent move. The line of retreat for our men was on the circumference of a semicircle, the centre point of which, together with the entire diameter, was in the hands of the enemy. The resistance offered by the mounted infantry for a long time prevented the enemy from utilizing some of the most favourable ground that would otherwise have been at his disposal upon our exposed flank. Riding up on to the ridges I met Captain Riddell, of the Northumberland Fusiliers, whose company was deployed along the crest line, and at his request cantered further to the right in order to ascertain whether some men whom he had observed coming back towards that part were actually arriving, he having lost sight of them. Just as I reached the kopje, which had hitherto hidden them from view, I came upon the party coming in all right, so was able to return and reassure Riddell as to their fate. Little, however, did either of us then realize that not less than 500 men, in addition to the killed and wounded,

* Devon Regiment, and since promoted captain.

were boxed up in a trap and were shortly to be made prisoners. The few regarding whom we were at the moment interested, represented merely a tiny fragment that had succeeded in breaking loose.

"It was curious how few at this time seemed to have grasped the fact that we were in an extremely tight place, but by degrees it dawned upon us. I talked for some time with the men of the Northumberland Fusiliers who were lying down in quarter column about 200 yards in rear of the ridges, my object being to get the soldiers' idea about what had taken place. That there had been very bad luck, and that they wished that they themselves had been in front at the time, seemed to be the only ideas prevailing. That there might be any further danger or difficulty did not seem to have crossed their minds. By degrees, however, from what I heard from various officers, I came to understand that we had had a very serious beating, and that more excitement would assuredly follow. Accordingly, I rode back towards the ridges, intending to have a good look round and obtain some notion of the general situation. Just, however, as I arrived, the troops received the order to retire on Molteno, and various local matters put general considerations out of my head. First there was a sergeant of the Northumberlands who dislocated his ankle amongst the boulders, and immediately afterwards there was a young subaltern of the Irish Rifles, named Stevens,* who had been shot through both

* Lieutenant Stevens was wounded during the retirement to the

lungs. The latter, under the circumstances, naturally interested me most; but my relations with the former resulted in an amusing incident which is worth telling, and to which I shall therefore refer presently. Meanwhile, the career of Lieutenant Stevens was remarkable. From the ridge he walked down for several hundred yards, supported by two men of his regiment. Then for about three-quarters of a mile four riflemen carried him in a blanket. From the blanket he was transferred to an ammunition wagon, upon which he was carried about a mile or more. His next conveyance was a hospital stretcher, and, finally, after a still longer interval, he reached the ambulance. Nothing but the marvellous pluck and endurance of the man could have saved him. Hurt as he was, nine men out of ten would have sunk from exhaustion. But Stevens had always a cheery smile as one rode up to see how he was getting on, and as he jolted along upon the ammunition wagon he laughed heartily when I told him how the black police who had been with me in the morning had deserted me in order to steal Boer horses that had stampeded during the firing. I was delighted to hear yesterday, when the P.M.O. returned from Queenstown, that Stevens is doing well and likely to recover. The sergeant also, I was rejoiced to learn, had reached the hospital. I was afraid that, after all, he might

ridges. He was rescued by Second Lieutenant Duncombe-Shafto of the Northumberland Fusiliers, and two privates, whom the latter called to his assistance. When my letter was written I was not aware of this, and supposed that Lieutenant Stevens had just been wounded on the ridges where I first saw him.

have been left on the road for reasons that will presently be explained.

"From the ridges this sergeant rode my horse to the rear with strict injunctions to send it back immediately, so soon as some other means of conveyance had been reached. My meaning, of course, was that a mounted man should lead back the horse. But it so happened that when my friend the sergeant caught up the ambulance the horse was handed over to some man or other belonging to I know not what, but, at all events, a man who had no rifle. This worthy, finding himself in possession of a horse, preferred to ride it himself to returning it to its rightful owner—and he rode it accordingly. Retribution, however, was speedily to fall upon him. Taking a short cut round a kopje, I intercepted him when emerging from a defile and had my revenge. Observing that he was unarmed, I thrust into his unwilling hands the rifle I had taken from the sergeant, and also made him take over a couple of handfuls of ammunition which I produced from my pockets. He had made me walk perhaps two miles with a rifle, but in the end he himself had to tramp twelve, carrying the same weapon into Molteno! It was, perhaps, two hours later when I again met my sergeant. Major Lilly, R.A.M.C., had asked me to ride forward to catch the ambulance, and, having turned out of it any men who could bear travelling on carts or wagons, to bring it back to pick up some bad cases in rear. Amongst those whom the non-commissioned officer in charge of the ambulance caused to dismount was my sergeant, who

inquired anxiously after his rifle. I reassured him as to this, and then left him sitting at the side of the road whilst I returned with the ambulance. When riding back once more I did not see him, so assumed that he had been picked up, but was much troubled about him, and naturally thankful when next day I was able to ascertain for certain that he had safely reached his journey's end. It would have been hard had I, after being instrumental in his being originally enabled to leave the field, been the cause of his being hereafter left behind and made a prisoner.

"During the rest of the march I do not think that any further proceedings of mine are worth writing about. I watched our artillery practice, and observed how excellently our mounted troops anticipated the enemy by taking possession of successive kopjes from which to keep him at a distance. The enemy, moreover, was, I thought, most unenterprising, and, except by the fire of his big gun of position, did but little to interfere with our retreat. This gun was well placed to command the road, and its fire was admirably directed. Fortunately, its shells generally failed to burst, and I do not believe it succeeded in doing us any damage. Finally, having been with the troops from about 5.30 a.m. until 10.15, I trotted along for the last couple of miles to Molteno and dismounted at the Central Hotel at 10.45. I have seen in my life one or two ticklish fights, but at Stormberg for the first time I was enabled to realize what actual defeat means. It was, indeed, a case of *væ victis.* The hopeless exhaustion of the unhappy soldiers was terrible to see."

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER STORMBERG.

On first realizing the extent of the disaster which had befallen his column, General Gatacre gave orders for a general retreat on Queenstown. Fortunately, however, he was dissuaded from this intention, and yielding chiefly to the advice of Lieut.-Colonel Jeffreys, Royal Artillery, he decided to withdraw his main body only so far as Sterkstroom, and to maintain the advanced posts at Bushman's Hoek and Pen Hoek. During the afternoon and night of the eventful 10th of December, the evacuation of Molteno was carried out by road and rail; the artillery and infantry being conveyed at once to Sterkstroom, whilst the mounted infantry, etc., retired by road. Brabant's Horse remained at Molteno for the night, and at daylight retired as far as the Police camp, two miles south of Molteno on the Cyphergat road; afterwards marching to Pen Hoek, from whence they had come. The garrison of Pen Hoek had been included in the strength of the force detailed for the attack on Stormberg, but owing to some bungling about the transmission of orders from Putter's Kraal, the instructions sent to the commandant failed to reach

him in time. Brabant's, the Cape Mounted Rifles, and the battery of the latter corps, all of which were at Pen Hoek, were consequently late for the fight. Brabant's, under De Montmorency, indeed arrived on the ground after all was over, and covered Molteno against any advance of the Boer forces, but the Cape Mounted Rifles, having been compelled to travel more slowly with their guns, took no part in the operations. I slept Sunday night at the Central Hotel, Molteno, and never had such a good night in all my life. I dined at 6.30 and retired to my room at 7.30. Then, after a hot bath, turned in, and never stirred, so far as I am aware, until shortly after 8 a.m. on Monday. I was very tired indeed, but my fatigue, compared with that of those who had been on their own legs throughout the business, must have been a mere nothing. Poor Jess had much more to complain of than I. Her saddle had been put on at Putter's Kraal at 10 a.m. on Saturday, when she was ridden down to the station, and conveyed with seven other horses in an open cattle-truck to Molteno, where she was detrained and fed—the saddle being of course removed for the time. At 9.15 p.m., after a halt of about three hours at Molteno, she carried me towards the battle-ground, and by 2.30 a.m., including the return to Molteno for orders and the ride back once more to the front, she had, without counting any odds and ends but merely point to point distance, covered twenty-one miles. Then came a rest of one hour and a quarter, followed by, in one way or another (patrolling, getting to the fight, and going backwards

and forwards during the retreat), at least twenty-five miles more. Yet the good mare was pulling when she trotted in to Molteno at 10·45 a.m., and never seemed a bit the worse for what she had done.

Arendse, Cornelius, and the "weagon" arrived at Molteno during the afternoon, having come through by road from Putter's Kraal. It was curious to notice how very little the disaster seemed to affect these two Cape boys. They appeared quite confident that more soldiers would soon come and put everything to rights. Shortly after breakfast on Monday morning I had a wire from Amery (chief correspondent of the *Times* at Cape Town) directing me to go myself or send my assistant to join General French at Rensburg. Had Stormberg been a victory I should most certainly have elected to go to Rensburg myself, since the presence of a large force of cavalry at the latter place gave promise of very interesting operations. But as it was, I could not make up my mind to forsake the 3rd Division on the very day following the disaster. So I decided to send Hallimond to Rensburg and remain myself. No doubt in so deciding I made a great mistake. However, that is past.

At about 9.45 a.m. my cavalcade started for Bushman's Hoek, where we arrived about one o'clock, and remained for the night. I cannot recollect having ever been colder or more uncomfortable. A strong gale was blowing, and its blast was most chilling. Early on Tuesday morning we continued our march to Sterkstroom, where things had already begun to look ship-

shape. The tents had come up, and the troops had pulled together wonderfully well. The camp was close to the station, and, so far, was conveniently placed; but, tactically speaking, we were in a very bad position, and had we been attacked it is difficult to say what might have happened. There is an excellent position about a mile to the south-west, but water was a difficulty. This could, however, have been overcome, as boring machines were available, and were used in order to provide wells in the camping ground.

During Tuesday evening, after my arrival, I wrote my letter describing the Stormberg disaster, and on Wednesday, 13th, I rested, after the turmoil of the past few days. On Thursday morning we heard of Methuen's fight at Magersfontein, which seemed to have been terribly bloody and upon the whole distinctly unfavourable to our troops. After our so-called victories we seem never to be left masters of the field and in a position to count the bodies of the dead Boers. According to the reports received the enemy's losses have invariably been enormous, but we have been altogether without evidence as to the actual number of the slain. The Highland Brigade appears to have walked straight into the lion's mouth, just as we ourselves did on that fatal Sunday. Such catastrophes cannot be classed as accidents. If a man "coasts" down a steep, winding hill and runs into a flock of sheep or some other obstacle, the consequences to himself and to his bicycle are not the result of accident, but of recklessness. So also in the case of columns surprised upon the march. If

proper precautions are taken, surprise is impossible, and therefore somebody in the force that allows itself to be surprised must *ipso facto* be guilty of negligence.

With reference to the disaster at Stormberg a most peculiar incident was brought to my notice. Captain Hall's company of the Royal Irish Rifles lost touch of the battalion and was proceeding by the main road from Molteno to Stormberg, but, unfortunately as it happened, the error was detected * and the company was brought back on to the Steynsburg road. Had Captain Hall been left to proceed by the Stormberg road his company would have bivouacked thereon with the hospital, the Maxim gun of his battalion, and the other details that had become detached. The result would have been as follows: At 3.45 a.m., when we three Correspondents, together with two Cape policemen and four blacks, rode forward to reconnoitre, I had it from Captain Hall himself that he would have moved with his company and the Maxim to support us. Three-quarters of an hour later, when we had located the fight and sent a guide to conduct the hospital, etc., by a circuitous route to the rear of our troops, Captain Hall would have elected to go straight for the field of battle as we did. The consequence would have been that, instead of three Correspondents watching helplessly the retreat of our men from the scene of their surprise to the defensive position upon which they rallied, a hundred rifles and a Maxim would have opened fire from an excellent point of vantage upon the flank and rear of the Boers.

* By Lieutenant Sitwell, the adjutant, whose eyes were everywhere.

Such an interposition would, in my opinion, have saved the day. The riflemen and Maxim would have arrived, probably unseen, within a thousand yards of the Boers. Certainly we were very ill-served by fortune.

I also learned that two mounted infantry men of the Berkshire regiment actually reported the error of the guide in passing by the correct turn to the right from the Steynsburg road, but their protest was unheeded by the officer to whom it was addressed, he naturally supposing that the guide at the head of the column knew better.

On the morning of the 15th it had been my intention to accompany a patrol of the mounted infantry under Lieutenant Braithwaite, Northumberland Fusiliers, in the direction of Tarkastad, but at the last moment the patrol was despatched by a different route to that originally intended, and consequently I missed the party. However, I had a most enjoyable ride whilst searching for the patrol, and saw quite a large number of springbok, besides capturing a tortoise, which I brought back to camp in triumph when I returned to breakfast at 9 a.m. The scenery to the west of Sterkstroom is very fine, and the morning was comparatively cool. The headquarters of the Royal Scots marched into camp from Putter's Kraal about 10 a.m. The men were a very fine-looking lot. The other four companies of the Scots were already at the front at Bushman's Hoek.

Some friends from Queenstown came by rail to see

the camp and have lunch with me. A fearful sand-storm was in full swing, and to give ladies lunch in my tent was hopeless. However, we took possession of the ladies' waiting-room at the railway station, which was only a hundred yards distant, and managed very well indeed, although Arendse, overcome with his responsibilities, had the mutton chops ready before noon, and these were consequently of a rather cinder-like description when we encountered them at 1.30 p.m.

In the evening we heard that the 10th Brigade was *en route* to join the division, but next morning we were bitterly disappointed to learn that this welcome and much-needed reinforcement had been at the last moment diverted to Lord Methuen. The 1st Battalion of the Derbyshire Regiment, then landing at East London, represented all the assistance that Sir Redvers was in a position to grant us. This meant inactivity and a consequent spread of rebellion. I heard upon reliable authority that some 400 colonials joined the enemy since our defeat of Sunday. Naturally, numbers of those who were still wavering threw in their lot with their kinsmen. The situation in the district was thus becoming extremely serious, and something needed to be done. I hoped that, on the arrival of the Derbyshires, we should at least reoccupy Molteno. The guns lost at Stormberg had been replaced,* and the 79th Field Battery had joined, thus completing

* By depriving Second Lieutenant Reeves, R.A., of two 15-pounders that had recently been given to him instead of his antique muzzle-loaders.

the brigade-division. A howitzer battery had also arrived at Queenstown, so that we were stronger than before.

The Derbyshires arrived in camp whilst we were at church parade on Sunday, 17th. A very fine-looking battalion. They had been lucky as regards the weather, which had been threatening all day; but the rain, most considerately, delayed its descent upon us until after the new-comers had pitched their camp.

With the Colenso disaster, of which we became aware on the 18th, the prospect of any serious military enterprise in the immediate future became more than ever discouraging. The news from Natal was decidedly bad, and our howitzer battery was taken from us, no doubt in order to make good the losses in artillery so unhappily experienced on the Tugela. Moreover, the Northumberland Fusiliers were ordered to East London, and, our infantry force being thereby reduced to a strength equivalent to only two battalions, the column became almost impotent. The Derbyshires were very strong, nearly 1100, but the Irish Rifles had been reduced by losses at Stormberg to about 500 of all ranks, and of the Royal Scots but four companies were available. Under the circumstances no move forward seemed feasible.

I could not help thinking that the strategical organization of the campaign had been injudiciously contrived. We tried to be ubiquitous, and consequently paid the usual penalty. Weak everywhere, we left the initiative with the enemy. Had the whole force in Cape Colony

been concentrated for a single effort against Bloemfontein, the mere fact of our proceeding against it would have sufficed to raise the siege of Kimberley, and at the same time to remove a great deal of pressure from Natal. Concentration of force is always preferable to dispersion, except in cases where the only object that needs to be considered is the destruction of the enemy. In the present campaign we have been obliged to pay much attention, and not wholly successfully, to securing our own safety. Strategically we had had for a long time the worst of it, whilst tactically we could not justly claim any valuable balance in our favour. It should from the first have been taken into account that Boer troops, like all irregulars, are most formidable when in comparatively small bodies, and that the proper aim of the commander of a regular army opposed to such an enemy is to compel concentration against himself by directing a sufficiently heavy force against some important and unmistakable objective. Thus, had we marched 25,000 men on Bloemfontein, instead of attempting a direct relief of Ladysmith, the Boers must either have concentrated to oppose us or been content to permit our movement to take place without serious hinderance. Such concentration would have compelled the enemy to raise the siege of Kimberley and to renounce all incursions over the Cape Colonial border, besides seriously shaking the confidence of the invading army in Natal. There was but one thing that comforted me with reference to the manner in which Sir William Gatacre's division was permitted to drift along

in an incomplete condition. And this was, that we were clearly being kept in a state of abnormal weakness merely in order that other columns might be strengthened. Thus concentration seemed really coming to be regarded as desirable, although in two directions instead of in one only.

Of all the regrettable incidents recorded in the history of the region allotted to the 3rd Division, the next after our disastrous repulse at Stormberg, December 10, was the failure to reoccupy that formidable position immediately on the arrival of the Royal Irish Rifles at Queenstown, when such an operation at once became feasible. The Rifles and Sir William Gatacre reached Queenstown on November 18, and it was not until the 26th that the Boers took possession of Stormberg. I admit that a detachment at that time occupying Stormberg would have been exposed to the chances of a siege, but I do not think that it could have been in the smallest danger of capture. In any case the risk attending an expedition for the purpose of relieving a British garrison at Stormberg would have been far less than that which we actually incurred with such fatal results in attacking the Boer position. However, that which is done is done, and it is easy to appear wise after the event. Moreover, I feel sure that had General Gatacre had any reason to suppose that the troops promised him were not destined to arrive he would have anticipated the Boers in the occupation of Stormberg. With an entire division at his disposal the general could have made the Boer position

untenable without being obliged to waste a man in attacking it. Naturally, therefore, he awaited the arrival of means for the accomplishment of that bloodless result. If generals could always foresee the march of events then there would be few mistakes made in war, and the critics who know afterwards what the generals cannot under existing conditions know at the time, would find their occupation gone.

On the 19th, as previously arranged, the shattered remnant of the Northumberland Fusiliers departed for East London—to my great regret. I had received infinite kindness from this most hospitable battalion.

Upon the following morning I heard finally that my going to Natal could not be arranged, for reasons that I recognized to be unanswerable. And having nothing better to do I employed myself in reviewing the general situation as follows:—*

"The political horizon at the present time is heavily clouded and necessarily reflects the military situation. The only thing that has so far prevented a general rising of the colonial Boers is the manifest determination of Great Britain to persevere until completely victorious. Were any doubt to arise upon this latter subject, every waverer would instantly declare for the enemy. Boer loyalty has scarcely any appreciable existence except in the imagination of professional anti-Englanders. Every member of the Bond proves himself, *ipso facto*, a rebel at heart, since no loyal

* This extract is taken from a letter published in the *Times* of January 19.

subject could possibly reconcile membership with loyalty. The aims and teaching of the Bond are the overthrow of British power in order to make room for a pan-Afrikander confederation; but, as a rule, the influential members have not hitherto been prepared to risk person or property in anything further than what is now termed constitutional agitation, but was formerly known as treasonable conspiracy. The quarrel between the Transvaal and the British Government has offered a chance to the Bond such as could have been gained by no other means, and if it is sought to comprehend the reasons which moved the Orange Free State to make common cause with the sister Republic, one has not far to seek. Bond intrigues lie at the bottom of everything. At the present time the Republics are both of them very angry, and justly so, with their colonial brethren, because so many fair promises of support have yielded comparatively little result in the form of armed adherents. But the Bond is playing its own game in its own way. Should the Republics vanquish Great Britain, the Bond pulls off the long odds and wins a huge stake; whilst so carefully has hedging been attended to that in the contrary event these 'loyal' subjects stand to lose nothing. 'Loyalty' at present means abstention from active rebellion and no more; but even this remaining shred is now being subjected to a heavy strain. Many of the doubters are beginning to wonder whether the numerous reverses of the British may really be accepted as evidence of forthcoming victory for the allied Republics

—their cat'spaws. The moral effect of any great success upon either side just now would be tremendous. For example, should Lord Methuen relieve Kimberley within the next few days, not only would the tide of rebellion be instantly checked, but many now in arms would steal back to their farms. Upon the other hand, were Kimberley to fall, our enemies would gain the services of several thousands of colonists. Had Gatacre been successful in his attack upon Stormberg, the rebel movement in the eastern provinces would have been reduced to positive impotence. His failure has added several hundred men to the enemy's commandos. The marvel is that this local rising has been of such comparatively small dimensions. Probably the fact is that nearly all those of a really adventurous spirit have already joined hands with their kinsmen, whilst the remainder still need further convincing as to the probability of ultimate success before deciding to risk their necks or their farms. Your Afrikander is a shrewd man of business. He is willing to speculate only when, whatever the fate of the venture itself, he can see what he firmly believes to be a sure source of gain for himself. The fog of war still limits the power of reading the future, and pending the appearance of a strong light the Bond and its adherents will continue sitting upon the fence.

"The Free State troops invaded the Cape Colony only because they were pressingly invited to do so. Naturally, the commanders expected a great number of men from the territory invaded to join their standards,

but they were doomed to disappointment. Consequently, proclamations were issued annexing the districts occupied, and, this done, commandeering commenced in order to provide, under pressure, the recruits who had failed to join voluntarily. But the application of commandeering has been very partial; the rich Boers escaping it, and only the poor being enrolled for service without their own consent. As a body the well-to-do Boers will have nothing to say to rebellion unless they can clearly foresee its success, and since this remains improbable, outward 'loyalty' will be preserved to the end. Afterwards, rebels and arch-rebels will sing 'God save the Queen' with the best of us, and resume the paths of constitutional agitation."

There was a field-day at 5 on the morning of December 21, the object of which, so far as I could understand, was to enable the general to judge the value of a neighbouring position by standing thereon whilst it was being attacked. The conclusion to which he probably arrived was that, if the enemy would only employ similar tactics to those adopted in the instance under his observation, the position could certainly be held without difficulty, and the attackers would suffer heavy loss. It was the old, old story, use of ground utterly ignored, and faith pinned solely upon a frontal attack directed across the open veldt. We play so, fight so, and get beaten so. Something in the climate of South Africa has clearly produced an epidemic of mental aberration amongst our superior officers. Africa is proverbially the grave of military reputations, and

with these sink also the bodies of brave officers and men. We have beaten the Boers in the end, but by sheer weight of numbers, not by the superior skill and efficiency that should have given the advantage to an army composed chiefly of highly-trained Regular troops.

CHAPTER IX.

DE MONTMORENCY'S OPERATIONS ABOUT DORDRECHT.

On December 22, De Montmorency, with a mixed patrol, in all fifty strong, met a party of about thirty Boers between Halseton and Dordrecht, about nine miles west of the latter place. The Boers fled precipitately, leaving a wagon loaded with stores and three rifles in possession of the patrol.

The next day De Montmorency, following up this success with an increased force and the armoured train, in all 170 officers and men, attacked 300 Boers near Koups Laagte, and, continuously outflanking them in spite of their superior force, drove them for over seven miles from kopje to kopje until they took refuge in Dordrecht. Only that portion of the force under De Montmorency's own command (about sixty men) was actually engaged; the supporting squadron of Brabant's Horse, under Captain Fielden, having no share in the fighting. The armoured train returned to Sterkstroom at night, but De Montmorency bivouacked upon the ridges overlooking Dordrecht, and about two miles from the town. Reinforcements were applied for, but not granted, and the party was ordered to retire. This

was a pity. A favourable moral effect would have been created by the capture of the Landdrost with a few other prominent rebels, and would have been worth a little risk. In actual fact there was no danger of a reverse, the enemy being completely demoralized.

On the morning of the 24th I accompanied the armoured train which left at daylight to cover the retirement of De Montmorency and his men. The enemy, however, made no sign, and consequently we were back at Sterkstroom by lunch-time. Then, indeed, there was a real sensation. In my tent I found a telegram, brief, but full of importance: "Roberts coming out Commander-in-Chief; Kitchener Chief of Staff; lots more mounted troops." The first part of this telegram was sensational enough, and also most satisfactory. Yet it did not afford a text for any comments of mine. But as to the second part I wrote as follows:—

"Apparently the authorities have at length realized that mounted infantry are more than a match for ordinary infantry, unless the latter be in overwhelming force, and prepared to sustain immense losses wholly disproportionate to the results achieved. Whilst our slow-moving infantry are laboriously prosecuting a wide detour, the mounted Boer will jump on his horse and reinforce the threatened flank, or not seldom form a false flank beyond it. What we need is to have mobile troops of some sort, regular or irregular matters not, so long as they are expert riflemen and reasonably well-mounted. To beat the Boer we must adopt Boer

methods, more especially as these are all of them strictly in accordance with the common-sense dictates of modern tactical science. The Boer carries out his tactical and other manœuvres on horseback, and we must do the same. Mobility superior to that of the enemy enables a force to deliver or to decline battle at will, or in the event of a combat to frustrate by counter manœuvres all attempts of the assailant to work round the flanks. It is idle for an army composed for the most part of infantry to attempt manœuvring against an enemy whose chief strength is in mounted infantry, since the latter can always concentrate with such speed upon the threatened point that superiority attained against him can seldom be more than temporary. Success, be it admitted, can of course be gained by the combination of frontal and flank attacks, but only at great cost. Upon the contrary, however, when opposed by troops having mobility equal to their own, and who show sufficient dash under good leaders, the Boer can readily be dislodged from almost any position. In support of this I have only to quote the success achieved by De Montmorency yesterday. Upon this, as on every other occasion, the Boers fled precipitately upon the instant that each successive position had been turned. At last, so completely was the enemy demoralized that when, after a race for a kopje, De Montmorency 'got there first,' with only three men, he was permitted to retain his advantage. The Boer, for all that is said, is not as a rule a courageous fighter; but he is a crafty and a skilful one. The stubborn resistance offered by

Boer forces during the present war is to be accounted for by the fact that, in spite of sensational allegations to the contrary, their losses have almost invariably been insignificant. Any troops will fight on so long as they escape punishment. I am convinced that had the same Boers who fled before some sixty men under De Montmorency yesterday been holding the position at Sterkstroom, attacked by British infantry at the field-day mentioned in the second paragraph in this letter,* they would have held it successfully, or at all events been enabled to withdraw after trifling loss, whilst the casualties upon our side would have been extremely heavy."

Scarcely had De Montmorency withdrawn from the western side of Dordrecht when Colonel Dalgety and the Cape Mounted Rifles, whose co-operation had been expected upon the previous day, marched into the town unopposed from the east. It appears that the commando which fled before De Montmorency's Scouts was so completely disorganized that it melted away. The members, mostly rebel farmers, were no doubt soon back on their farms, and peacefully following the ordinary avocations of husbandmen. The success gained by Colonel Dalgety was satisfactory, but had the troops acting from this direction been immediately reinforced, it is probable that the rebel commando might have been captured almost to a man. Colonel Dalgety's Mounted Riflemen operated against Dordrecht from Clarke's Siding, seven miles east of that place, whilst Feilden,

* The Field-day mentioned at the end of the preceding chapter.

with his squadron of Brabant's Horse and the Scouts under De Montmorency, advanced from the west. Thus had all things been well the enemy should have been pinched between the two forces.

Christmas Day in Sterkstroom camp was chiefly remarkable for the utterly vile character of the weather. A hot wind, blowing half a gale, with clouds of dust, and followed up in the afternoon by a furious thunderstorm. Anything more un-Christmaslike it would be impossible to imagine.

I dined with the Mounted Infantry, in accordance with a fairly long standing engagement, and although Amphlett's company had been unexpectedly sent off on patrol towards Dordrecht, we spent a very pleasant evening. Our plum-pudding was one of a number sent out by Mrs. Alderson with the Mounted Infantry Battalion when it sailed from England under the command of her husband. Needless to say, it proved to be most excellent.

Boxing Day was celebrated by a gymkhana meeting, most successfully organized by the Frontier Mounted Rifles. There was a full programme, which kept us interested from 11.45 a.m. until dark.

On the 27th I went down to have a look at the artillery horses, and was much distressed to find very little signs of picking-up condition. The great majority were badly tucked up and many very much hide-bound. All this was, I think, due to the constant field-days held in conjunction with the Mounted Infantry. Of course, in the case of the 74th and 77th

Field Batteries, the traces of the terribly hard work which they went through before, during, and after the disastrous fight at Stormberg could scarcely have been effaced altogether; but certainly I expected to have seen a better recovery than had been made. After a month at sea horses require tender treatment until they have regained their strength. Instead of this, ours were being worked just as if they were in the pink of condition. "Fat horses" are no doubt an abomination and a deception, but they are preferable to animals with their bellies drawn up to their backbones. The 79th Field Battery, which escaped the Stormberg ordeal, seemed a trifle better off than the other two as regards flesh, but this advantage was discounted by the extraordinary prevalence of bad feet. In many cases it seemed quite marvellous that the farriers succeeded in finding any hold for the nails, and as the condition of the feet was clearly a long-standing evil, it does not appear as if the selection of the animals can have been very carefully conducted. Horses with brittle feet are no use for a campaign. A draft of New Zealand horses had arrived and, although rather ugly, as a rule, they appeared to be a useful lot. Eight, however, were quite unbroken.

Sir George Clarke's "spade" seems to give general satisfaction. Many remedies are found to be even worse than the disease, but in this case the check to the recoil is effected without involving any consequent inconveniences in other directions. An artillery officer told me that he invariably made use of the spade

whether rapid fire was required or not. In a word, this invention seems to be exactly what is required; it is efficient as a means of checking the recoil, whilst at the same time involving no loss of freedom in training the gun at will. This is where the central spade shows its marked superiority over the various other systems, such as the Darmancier, which adopt a spade at the end of the trail. All that we now need is the nearest possible approach to a genuine quick-firer mounted upon the Woolwich carriage. A real quick-firing field gun of reasonable calibre is practically an impossibility, because a necessary condition is that the carriage shall be master of the gun, and this is inconsistent with mobility, except in the case of a small gun—such as the "Pom-pom."

On December 28, De Montmorency, with thirty of his Scouts and their horses, proceeded by train to Dordrecht. The object was to discover the positions and strength of the Boer forces reported to be in the neighbourhood of that place. At Dordrecht we were rapturously received by the few English in the place. The town is on a hillside about two miles north-west of the railway station. On the west side of the station road, about one and a half mile from it and nearly equidistant from town and station, a mixed force of Brabant's Horse, Cape Police, and Cape Mounted Rifles with four 7-pounder M.L. guns, was encamped under the command of Captain Goldsworthy, C.M.R.

Next morning De Montmorency set forth in search of the enemy. The weather was truly awful, and from

first to last the changes were rung between Scotch mist and thunderstorms, varied once, in the case of the latter, by a severe shower of hail. Under such circumstances reconnaissance, more especially in a mountainous country, was naturally difficult. Indeed, at times it was impossible to see more than a few hundred yards. At all events, not a Boer was to be seen, although in the course of our wanderings we passed under the very hills on which the enemy was found upon the following day, and from the summits of which I have every reason to believe that their sentries must actually have been watching us. The object of the expedition was twofold—(1) To find out the position of a large commando reported to be about six or seven miles north-west of Dordrecht; (2) to find a smaller commando said to be a little further to the west, and if opportunity offered to give the latter a fright. This smaller commando was reported to consist of the rebel colonists, whom De Montmorency had chased eastwards into Dordrecht the week before, and was that which we chiefly desired to meet. It had, however, most evidently cleared altogether or else had joined forces with its stronger neighbour. To give an idea of how deceptive is the veldt on a misty day I need only mention that a flock of sheep, which the thunderstorm had caused to close up into a block, was actually mistaken for a Boer laager! This misconception was not dispelled until after our scouts, advancing with the utmost caution. had approached within 400 yards. At double that distance all of us were prepared to certify that we could

see wagons, oxen, and mounted men. Now De Montmorency's Scouts were picked men, and, whether colonial or home born, every one of them thoroughly accustomed to solving all the various conundrums that life on the veldt gives rise to.

As the result of the day's work the existence of the small commando as an isolated unit was considered to be disproved, and De Montmorency therefore determined to devote all his energies upon the following day to fixing the exact position of the larger one, and, if possible, obliging it to disclose its strength.

The programme for December 30 was as follows:—A detachment of Captain Goldsworthy's force at the Dordrecht camp was to be placed at the disposal of Captain De Montmorency. Lieutenant De Cerjat, Frontier Mounted Rifles, temporarily attached to the "Scouts," was to proceed with an English farmer to a point from which the latter alleged that the Boer laager could clearly be seen. Having grasped the situation, De Cerjat was to join the patrol at the appointed rendezvous, about half-way between Dordrecht and Labuschagne's Nek. Unfortunately a strong Boer patrol impeded the researches of De Cerjat, so that he was prevented from reaching the intended point. Finally, De Montmorency decided to proceed without waiting any longer for De Cerjat. But meanwhile there had been a considerable delay, and the enemy had been given time to take up positions upon the hills about Labuschagne's Nek with a force amounting to

209680R

at least 800 men. Had we been one hour earlier it seems probable that we should have been able to occupy these hills, and from them overlook the laager. Yet, even as things actually turned out, we ascertained the enemy's fighting position, his approximate strength, and the fact that he was provided with two excellent guns. In short, sufficient information was obtained, and therefore we had every reason to be satisfied.

However, this desirable result was not achieved without some hard fighting, and the various incidents are deserving of a full description.

At 12.45 p.m. a scout belonging to the patrol on our right flank was fired at as he rode along the slope of the adjoining hill, about half a mile south-east of Labuschagne's Nek. Captain De Montmorency, who was with the advanced party on the road, immediately galloped over the drift, where the road crosses the donga, and having placed the horses behind a fold of ground, commenced replying to the fire by which he was instantly assailed from the rugged slopes on the south side of the nek. Orders were sent to the main body to get cover in the donga to the south-west of the drift; a party being detached towards the south-western outlet of the donga in order to guard against any turning movement. A small picquet was also let drop, during the advance, with orders to safeguard the right rear, more especially against any movement by way of the donga from the south-east.

An idea of the scene of operations can be gained from the sketch.

The enemy was in force on the double-crested ridge of hills above the right bank of the donga, and was still arriving thereon from the hills to the east and north-east, at the time when the Scouts had reached the drift crossing the donga just above the point B.

Observing the weakness of the party opposed to them, the Boers very soon took the offensive, galloping down from the nek and endeavouring to turn the left flank. The first effort was defeated by De Montmorency and the few men with him. On seeing what was about to occur De Montmorency galloped round the rising ground west of the donga and surprised the Boers with a rapid fire from its south-western end. The enemy retired precipitately whence he had come. Just at this time, 1.45 p.m., De Cerjat arrived, having a trooper of Brabant's Horse with him. I explained to him that as far as I could see there was a prospect of a stiff affair, and suggested that he should send the man in to report to Goldsworthy at Dordrecht, asking him to bring reinforcements. This De Cerjat instantly did. At 2.35, after a lull followed by heavy firing, the Boers made another nasty rush, and, avoiding De Montmorency, worked right round until they fell foul of Captain Flanigan of Brabant's Horse, who commanded the party at the head or western outlet of the donga. Recoiling from the accurate fire of Flanigan's men, the enemy took cover about a thousand yards north-west,

and the firing was soon brisk. It struck me that if this party of Boers should be reinforced sufficiently to contain Flanigan and at the same time execute a turning movement by way of the valley to our left, things might get rather awkward; therefore I determined to ride myself to hasten the arrival of Goldsworthy. But before leaving the ground I thought it desirable to acquaint the picquet guarding our right rear—which was posted overlooking the donga about seven hundred yards from the point where the Dordrecht road reached the top of the plateau. Here was a cluster of rocks which afforded an excellent little position. My fear was that when Goldsworthy arrived the picquet might mistake friends for enemies. Just as I reached the picquet I saw a party of our men, which I rightly surmised to be that actually with De Montmorency himself, galloping rapidly towards us along the bottom of the donga. This finally decided me that not only must I do as I had proposed, but do so quickly. De Montmorency was evidently about to reinforce the picquet and then retire his main body under cover of it. At 2.50 I began to gallop, and at 3.40 I was back at the same place once more and Goldsworthy and his men with me. I met them only just emerging from Dordrecht, or, in other words, about five and a half miles from the scene of action. On our arrival on the plateau we met De Montmorency, who explained the situation. He had given orders for the whole force to retire, covered by the picquet on the right rear, which he had, as I had expected, reinforced with the Scouts who had

been skirmishing under his own command. Having seen this covering party properly posted, De Montmorency had returned by himself to see the retirement carried out, and on reaching the head of the donga, he met Flanigan just emerging, and inquired about Milford, whose detachment had been posted near the drift at B. Flanigan replied that Milford had received the order and was coming along all right. To make things quite sure, De Montmorency galloped along the eastern bank of the donga to B—being heavily fired at while so doing—and not finding Milford naturally concluded that Flanigan was right, and returned to the picquet. Actually what had happened was that Milford had been obliged to change his position owing to a cross-fire which commanded that first taken up, and De Montmorency had thus failed to find him. Meanwhile it was very naturally concluded that Milford had really received the order and would presently appear, there being, so far as could be seen, nothing to stop him. We did not know that in consequence of their horses having been shot, and being encumbered with wounded, Milford's party could not move.

Therefore, it being believed, as I have explained, that the entire force had been extricated, De Montmorency and Goldsworthy thought only of an attempt to punish the Boers who were engaged with Flanigan's covering party on the left front; and accordingly the whole galloped across the plateau for that purpose, receiving as they went a well directed but ineffective fire from the hostile artillery. A series of skirmishes ensued

westward of the original scene of the engagement, and finally the troops returned by the Jamestown road to Dordrecht. The absence of Milford's party caused no immediate alarm; but as the evening wore on a suspicion of the truth enforced itself upon us, and finally the arrival of a messenger from Milford removed any doubt as to what had occurred. Captain Goldsworthy reported the situation to the authorities, and, with reference to his suggestions about reinforcements and a rescue, was reminded that it was seldom desirable to risk a large force in an attempt to extricate a small one. In face of this cold water Goldsworthy determined to engage every available man, as well as his four "pop-guns"—7-pounder muzzle-loaders. For thus manfully facing responsibility Goldsworthy deserves the highest praise. It was arranged that the troops should reach the ground at daylight next morning, and accordingly a start was made at 2.30 a.m. Whilst De Montmorency and his remaining Scouts made for the donga, by crossing the valley forming the south-western boundary of the plateau, intending at all costs to reach their beleaguered comrades with a supply of ammunition, Goldsworthy, with 115 men and the C.M.R. guns under Captain Lukin, reached the south-eastern end of the plateau by the road, and after scouts had carefully examined the ground, men were dismounted and others led their horses to the spot where Milford's party was confined. Meanwhile Goldsworthy himself, with the dismounted men, covered the right flank by advancing along the donga itself. The success of this venture was due to

the enemy having evidently shifted their artillery, no doubt in order to put it in a position to shell the donga, and not having had time to get it back again. At all events, not a gun was fired by the enemy until after the operation had been completed. It was a ticklish business, more especially as the enemy made a target of the party carrying Lieutenant Warren, Cape Police, in a blanket. This party relying upon the forbearance of the enemy—as was indeed natural under the circumstances—made at once for the road from the donga instead of inclining to their right as others had done. I could see the bullets striking all around and amongst these men, but providentially none were hit. As soon as the front was clear of the rescued and rescuers the four guns of the C.M.R. opened fire on the Boer position, and shortly afterwards the enemy replied. There was an artillery duel for about three-quarters of an hour, during which we sustained no casualties. The whole force then retired to Dordrecht. My telegram to the *Times* was delivered at Dordrecht Station by my own hand at 9.30 a.m., but when I reached Sterkstroom at 4.30 p.m. it had not yet arrived. This was very unlucky. Having been the only correspondent present on the ground, it was hard that I should have obtained no start of the others, who had been comfortably sitting in Sterkstroom and gained their information from the Intelligence Department.

An adventure of my own, which took place during the morning's work, is worth telling. De Montmorency

asked me to write a note to Goldsworthy, explaining a few details which might possibly have been otherwise misunderstood, and also to make arrangements for the removal of our reserve ammunition from Dordrecht to the camp. Consequently, I started half an hour late, following the "spoor" of De Montmorency's party along the road. The moon was bright, and I had no difficulty until leaving the road, soon after which I lost the trail. However, I knew the general direction, and finally crossed the valley about daybreak, and mounted to the plateau just opposite the donga at a point where a small re-entrant breaks the general steepness of the further side of the valley. At the head of this was a loose stone wall, in which I proceeded to pull down a "gap" for my pony to pass through. Whilst I was thus engaged, I suddenly observed three men stealthily approaching, and not more than fifty yards from me. To run was impossible. Had it been otherwise, I should have certainly made a bolt of it, for I fully believed that those whom I saw were Boer scouts. I tried to appear unconcerned, and continued to pull down the gap. Then, as the men drew near, I discovered to my great relief that they were three of De Montmorency's men who were looking for a place to bring up the horses out of the valley. De Montmorency and most of the party had gone forward on foot, carrying ammunition to Milford, and leaving the horses to follow. My satisfaction under the circumstances can easily be imagined.

Milford. Hyde. De Cerjat.

THE DEFENDER OF THE DONGA.

Lieutenant Milford, Frontier Mounted Rifles, with Lieutenant De Cerjat of the same corps—a gallant Frenchman—and Captain Hyde, Xalanga Mounted Rifles. Lieutenant Milford's horse was one of the four that survived the fight unwounded.

[*To face p.* 106.

More especially as almost immediately afterwards we saw Goldsworthy's Scouts cantering across the plateau in the direction of the donga, and some Boers retiring rapidly towards Labuschagne's Nek under fire from Milford's party. Half an hour later I had the pleasure of shaking hands with Milford, Gordon Turner, and that most excellent man Doctor Perkins, all of whom were rescued safe and sound. The defence of their post in the donga by Milford and his thirty-five men against some 800 Boers with two guns was a fine performance, and contrasts somewhat sharply with many cases in which parties that have been "cut off" have surrendered without much ado. The enemy's loss, so far as could be ascertained, was 8 killed and 22 wounded, besides 33 horses killed and 2 captured uninjured. Of Milford's horses, 26 were killed, but otherwise his losses were wonderfully small: Lieutenant Warren, Cape Police, dangerously wounded (since dead), and two men slightly wounded.

Amongst the party was a "Scout," who, because he was a Dutchman, was regarded with some suspicion. However, during the fighting, this man cleared himself, and came to be recognized as a genuine "loyalist." It happened in this wise. A Boer galloped past, and the suspect, by a brilliant shot, killed the horse. After a short pause the man got up and began to run, when the Scout, after a preparatory spit to clear his eye, took steady aim and fired. The Boer threw up his hands and fell in a heap stone dead. It was

considered that, if the suspect had had any sympathies with his friends the enemy, he would at least have been sporting enough to give his fallen foe a "chance." Indeed, if anything, there was regret that he had not done so. However, he had effectually cleared his reputation.

CHAPTER X.

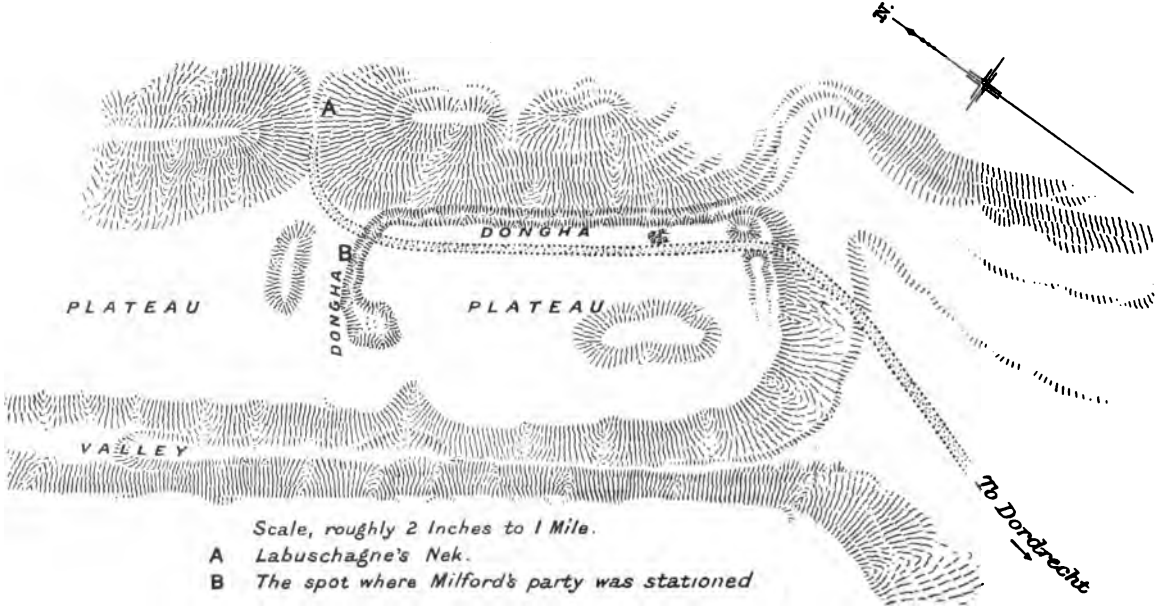
THE ACTION NEAR CYPHERGAT, JANUARY 3.

THE evacuation of Dordrecht on the evening of Sunday, December 31, was effected without any interference from the enemy, Colonel Dalgety, with the headquarters of the C.M.R. from Clarke's siding, and Captain Goldsworthy's detachment from Dordrecht, falling back upon the chosen position at Bird River, to which reference has already been made. De Montmorency and his Scouts at the same time returned to Sterkstroom. That the withdrawal from Dordrecht was a perfectly correct proceeding appears to be certain, although it was, I think, unwise to effect it upon the very evening of a distinctly successful skirmish, the moral effect of which was thus lost. It is far from improbable that a reconnaissance in greater force upon Monday morning would have had important results. A demonstration against the enemy's front, combined with a turning movement by way of the heights on the western side of Labuschagne's Nek, would have been very likely to bring about a precipitate retreat of the Boers and the capture of their laager. The risks would have been small, and the possibilities very considerable. Then, after having

struck a really hard blow, the troops could have been withdrawn without any sacrifice of prestige, because an unmistakable object for the original expedition would have been disclosed, and the retirement would have been accounted for by the fact that it had been effected. Under the actual circumstances it naturally appeared as if we had deliberately occupied Dordrecht, and subsequently realized that we could not retain our hold upon it. Such, indeed, was, moreover, actually the case. The mistake was in occupying the place at all with any considerable force. Having failed to cut off the commando that De Montmorency had chased through Dordrecht on the 23rd December, the Cape Mounted Rifles should have been immediately withdrawn to Bird River, unless it was intended to follow up the enemy with determination. In short, the same error was committed that has been so general throughout the war; namely, to occupy places that we cannot hold, and withdraw from them after compromising the inhabitants. Our newspapers cry unceasingly against the bad faith of those Boers who, having surrendered their arms and taken the oath of neutrality, have again fought against us. But how can we blame these men since we have failed to afford them the necessary protection? That some acted absolutely in bad faith is probably true, but that the vast majority yielded only to compulsion is certainly a fact. The number of times that some towns and districts have changed hands during the war is quite remarkable, and the consequences to the inhabitants have been most unpleasant.

LABUSCHAGNE'S NEK

From a rough sketch by the author



Scale, roughly 2 Inches to 1 Mile.

A *Labuschagne's Nek.*

B *The spot where Milford's party was stationed*

[*To face p.* 110.

De Montmorency's Scouts had been practically dismounted by their losses at Labuschagne's Nek, and their leader consequently repaired to Queenstown in search of remounts from the depôt. On Tuesday he returned with a few horses and a promise of more to follow. This was lucky for him, since had he delayed longer at Queenstown, he would have missed the fight at Cyphergat upon the following day, Wednesday, January 3. At 8.45 a.m. McNeil* kindly came over to my tent with the exciting news that the Police Camp north of Cyphergat, and overlooking Molteno, was being attacked in force, and that a strong commando was reported advancing on Bushman's Hoek by way of the Loperberg. In short, the Police Camp was thus completely isolated, and the relief of that post promised to be far from an easy matter. The General proposed to start at 10 a.m., after completing his arrangements for the day's work; but as I very well knew that he would gallop all the way, consideration for my horse caused me to anticipate his departure by twenty minutes. Bushman's Hoek is nine miles from Sterkstroom, and is some 1300 feet above it. I arrived at 10.45, and so did the General.

Following the General and staff, I led Jess up to the fort on the eastern crest of the Bushman's Hoek position, and from this point we could hear the heavy

* A.D.C. to Sir W. Gatacre, and who eventually succeeded De Montmorency in command of "Montmorency's Scouts." No worthier successor to the dead hero could have been selected. I think that had the choice been at De Montmorency's own disposal, he would have chosen McNeil.

firing at the Police Camp, and see the enemy in large numbers on the Loperberg, a high hill nearly due north of Bushman's Hoek, and about four miles distant. At the foot of the steep western slope, and nestling up into a re-entrant in the outline of the hill, lies the village of Cyphergat, with its railway station and coal-mines. The Loperberg effectually commands the road and railway to Molteno, and so long as the Boers continued in possession, it was useless to think of a serious advance to the relief of the Police Camp, about three miles nearer to Molteno. For the present, moreover, nothing much could be done, because, in consequence of the entire brigade-division of Artillery being absent several miles away at a "field-day," a long time would necessarily have to elapse before the guns could reach the scene of action. News of the attack reached Sterkstroom before 8.30 a.m., but it was 2.35 p.m. when our artillery at last opened fire. This delay was not, however, entirely due to the field-day. The guns reached Bushman's Hoek at about 1.30, but in consequence of a quite inexplicable decision to send them into action upon the exposed flank, in a bad position, and right under the kopjes between Bushman's Hoek and the Loperberg, more time was wasted whilst Dewar's Mounted Infantry made good the ground and occupied the kopjes, in order to protect them. The guns should have worked round under the western slopes, up the valley running north-west, and come into action just behind the crest of the plateau, about 2500 yards due west of the Loperberg, and ready, therefore,

BOOT AND SADDLE.

Cornelius about to "saddle-up" Jess.

[*To face p.* 112.

to support a pursuit northwards, in the event of the enemy retiring towards Molteno and Stormberg. By taking up the position that his battery (the 79th) was ordered to occupy, Armitage was at least three miles further from the enemy's line of retreat than would have been the case had he been posted as now suggested. Had two or more batteries been utilized, then indeed one of them might with advantage have been placed where Armitage actually came into action. Why we had only one battery I have never been able to understand.

Shortly after my arrival in the fort, I saw the Berkshire Mounted Infantry leave the camp below me and trot away in the direction of a small kopje about midway between our position and the Loperberg. I determined to go on with the Mounted Infantry, and accordingly parted company with the other two correspondents who had ridden out with me. My friends suggested that I should see nothing down in the plain, whilst where I actually was a perfect view of everything lay before me. Possibly this consideration might have carried weight under certain circumstances, but I saw a network of wire fences on both sides of the road, and cutting barbed wire to open up communications had for some time been a very favourite pastime of mine. I acquired the taste during poor De Montmorency's reconnaissances. As soon as the "Scouts" began to shoot, I used to begin making gaps to their right, left, and rear. It amused me, and not infrequently proved very convenient to the Scouts.

Filled with the lust for wire-cutting, I clambered down the steep rocky hill, Jess slithering after me as best she could, and then mounting, I cantered after Thornton and his men. I had caught up within less than a hundred yards when a shell from the Loperberg struck the ground about five yards from the right rear of the company, others in pretty quick succession passing over and all around it as it galloped quickly towards the friendly shelter of the kopje, under whose steep slope horses and men were speedily in safety. Fortunately, the enemy's guns failed to open until the Mounted Infantry had almost reached the point where the wire fence on the right of the road ceases to run northwards, and turns abruptly to the east. Less than a minute sufficed to clear the defile, and then extending rapidly, the company became safe against serious loss. For my part I had come to cut wire, and rightly judging that the enemy would not waste ammunition upon a single horseman, I pulled up as the first shell struck, and cut the wire immediately to my right; then, assisted by the camp butcher, who joined me soon after, I made gaps in every direction that I thought might be likely to prove useful.

There is an art in cutting wire fences. The plan is to choose a weak post that can be pulled down, and then cut the wire by the post to its right or left. Pull down the weak post, and then drag the whole length back and run it along where the fence is still standing. Thus, one post being missing, a man, even when galloping, can scarcely fail to detect the gap, and the

wire having been drawn right back parallel with the fence, no one can get entangled in it.

Having completed this operation to my satisfaction on the east of the road, I cantered to the kopje where Thornton and his Mounted Infantry had gone, and, leaving Jess below, climbed to the top. The enemy's fire was by this time hot, and the shrapnel kept bursting over the crest in a vicious manner that speedily caused me to realize that, unless I had come to stay, the sooner I was off the better. With the fire a trifle warmer, I should not have cared to run the gauntlet getting away. So down I went again, and galloped for all I was worth, nothing coming really near me. Having regained the road, I cut my way through the wires, and reached the crest of the rising ground on the west, from which I had an excellent view all round. It was well that I had lost no time, since no one else was able to attempt a move in the same direction for over an hour afterwards. Shortly after 1 p.m. a section of Mounted Infantry, which had crept along under shelter, began to pepper the Boers in Cyphergat, and these promptly retired upon their main body on the Loperberg. I ate my sandwiches and watched the proceedings. At 1.40 a single horseman raced from the kopje in my direction, and I instantly recognized De Montmorency's grey Arab, Baba, the same that he had ridden in the charge of the 21st Lancers at Omdurman. Previously to this moment, I had not realized that De Montmorency and the handful of his Scouts that had horses to ride, had attached themselves to Thornton. A hundred yards in

rear followed another, and then another, until thirty had passed me and reformed under a fold of the ground to my left rear as I sat facing the Loperberg. Then I knew what was coming. De Montmorency was evidently about to try and work round towards the Police Camp, and give what assistance he could to the hardly pressed garrison, who, judging by the noise, were evidently fighting hard.

I was undecided what to do. I knew that some artillery had arrived at Bushman's Hoek, and I knew, moreover, that a half battalion of the Royal Scots had also arrived by train. If I followed De Montmorency, I should miss whatever was going to be done upon a larger scale, and I did not think that there could be much longer delay in making a beginning. Fortunately, I determined to wait a bit longer and see what might happen. At about 2.25 I saw a battery, to my horror, moving along towards the position that I referred to some time back; but no sign of anything of the sort coming in my direction. Hitherto had I flattered myself that I was close to where our artillery would be sure to come. Certainly I was where it ought to have been. However, there was nothing for it but to watch what might be effected under the actual circumstances. At 2.35 the first gun was fired, and at 2.45 the Boer gun on the Loperberg, at which Armitage was sending his shells, was hastily withdrawn, and everywhere there were signs that the enemy was going to clear. I could see them in hundreds falling back from their positions, their flight being hastened by a well-

TROOPER BURN, V.C., AND "BABA."

"Baba" is the grey Arab ridden by De Montmorency at Omdurman, and subsequently in the Boer War. Trooper Burn won the Victoria Cross fighting alongside his master, to whom he was intensely devoted.

(*From a photograph taken in Egypt by the owner's sister.*)

[*To face p.* 116.

directed shrapnel fire. At 2.50 Thornton led his company from the kopje and cantered past me after De Montmorency. I waited nearly twenty minutes, hoping against hope for a general advance that came not, and for another battery to come galloping to my pet position. Meanwhile Armitage had begun to search the reverse slopes of the Loperberg, and with, as I soon afterwards ascertained from the police, quite marvellous success. He fired only twelve shrapnel, and of these three took effect. One plumped right into a commando of some 500 horsemen, doing considerable execution. Another fell in a smaller crowd of about 200, with equally good fortune; and a third hit one of our own 15-pounders which the Boers had captured at Stormberg, smashing the elevating gear all to pieces. That the enemy were retreating in haste was evident, and that even if a forward movement upon the part of the British was about to take place, it would be too late to do any good, became equally certain. Therefore I caught Jess, who was enjoying herself on the grass, and galloped after De Montmorency and Thornton to the Police Camp, in rear of which they had just dismounted when I arrived. There I saw a sight that I shall never forget. Streaming over the hills within 3000 yards some 2000 Boers were plainly visible, offering a beautiful artillery target. Had only our guns been where they should have been, the enemy must have had a sharp lesson. That wretched field-day was chiefly responsible for the loss of perhaps the best opportunity ever offered during the war.

Only one more thing was needed in order to ensure the capture or destruction of a large part of the enemy's force, and this was that the Pen Hoek garrison should have received orders to co-operate by intercepting the enemy's retreat. This could easily have been arranged, the distance being only fourteen miles. However, there was nothing to be done under the circumstances except to watch the skirmishing of our small force with the enemy's rear-guard. This was quite ineffectual, the latter having an excellent series of ideal positions, of which he took full advantage.

For a long time I could not understand how Inspector Neyland had managed to defend his post without loss. The ground showed unmistakable evidences of a very heavy bombardment, and I saw many cases of shrapnel shells that had evidently burst in the air at effective distances from the shelter trenches. The position was a hopelessly bad one, when considered in relation to modern firearms, and was indeed nothing but a death-trap. The conundrum was, however, easily explained. Neyland realized from the first that the position he had been ordered to occupy could not be held, and therefore he did not attempt the impossible. Captain "Ronny" Maclean, of the Mounted Kaffrarian Rifles, who had reinforced the post, was fortunately a man possessed of similar common sense. The two put their heads together, and the result was that the camp was left to take care of itself, and the men were judiciously disposed amongst the adjacent rocks, or anywhere that good cover could be found and a command retained

over the approaches to the position. Consequently, although the Boers kept pounding the camp hour after hour with artillery and musketry fire, the very fact that their fire was so well directed prevented any mischief being done to the defenders—for the simple reason that not a single man was in the entrenchments! Thus, when the enemy, very naturally assuming that their fire had been effectual, advanced to the attack, they were driven back with loss, by men who thanks to smokeless powder were concealed from their view, and who, having suffered no losses, had not become dismayed by the fire that had been directed upon their supposed position. The moral to be gathered from this incident is that the defenders of a small post in an exposed position should usually make use of their entrenchments by night only, and in the daytime should occupy pits or natural cover round about. Obviously the change from day positions to night, and *vice versâ*, should respectively take place after dark and before daylight. Under such conditions, at all events, it is quite clear that smokeless powder confers great advantages upon the defenders. Against an enemy who is not only unseen, but who is also supposed to be where he is not, the assailant is practically powerless. The attackers can only win their way by establishing a fire superiority; and so long as the defenders sustain no loss, it is obvious that such superiority cannot be attained, and therefore no attack, however resolutely conducted, can possibly succeed. On January 3rd the Boers very naturally imagined that the police holding

a very ill-chosen position would fall an easy prey. Fortunately, however, Inspector Neyland so arranged for the defence that he succeeded in defeating them. He was what they call "slim," and completely "verneuked" (*i.e.* outwitted) them.

At 5.30 p.m., the firing having ceased, I started in a hurry for Sterkstroom, in order to despatch my telegram to the *Times*. There was good reason for haste, and I had already delayed too long. My brother correspondents were, I well knew, six miles nearer Sterkstroom than I, but I had Jess, and this meant a good deal. When I had gone about two miles, I met the General and his staff, who asked me for news. When I had told him all I knew, the General decided to keep the artillery at Bushman's Hoek for the night, and asked me to take the message on my way home. Of course I could not refuse, but the delay troubled me not a little. Near Cyphergat, I found Armitage, and delivered the order. Naturally he wanted to hear all about the effects of his fire, and thus delayed me still further. Finally I got clear, and as the result, Jess completed her sixteen miles to Sterkstroom in one hour and twenty-seven minutes, which was not bad going, considering that her day's work had commenced at 9.45 a.m., and she had carried me, so far as I can estimate it, at least twenty miles before she commenced her return journey. I was five minutes behind my rivals, but good fortune permitted my wire to be the first sent away.

On Sunday, January 7, after church parade, I rode

with Lieut.-Colonel Morgan Payler and Major Bodè of the Royal Scots to the scene of Wednesday's engagement, which they were anxious to visit. For my own part I wished to verify on the ground the impressions that were already in my mind as to what might have been had the force been handled differently. Everything was exactly as I had supposed. The artillery could easily have reached a position west of the Loperberg, three miles nearer to the enemy's line of retreat than the spot upon which they actually came into action. The line of their advance would have been secure from fire, being entirely hidden under the western slopes of the ground. By the choice of this position much time would have been saved, because there would have been no ground on the exposed flank needing to be first made good by the Mounted Infantry escort, and, what would have been of still greater importance, a subsequent change of position in order to fire upon the retreating Boers could have been effected with ease and rapidity. The Boer guns having been silenced and put to flight, the Royal Scots could have mounted the Loperberg, supported by the greater portion of the Royal Irish Rifles from Bushman's Hoek, who could have occupied a covering position about Phillips's farm, midway from the camps and the Loperberg. Aided by artillery fire, the garrison of the Police Camp, reinforced as they were by the Berkshire Mounted Infantry and De Montmorency's Scouts, could have driven in the flank-guards placed by the Boers on the kopjes, covering their line of retreat, and assisted the

main body with great effect. The result must have yielded a notable success under any circumstances; but had, in addition, the Pen Hoek force been directed to co-operate, with four squadrons and the four guns of the Cape Mounted Rifles, the greater part of the Boer force, if not the whole of it, could scarcely have escaped capture. Fortified by the prestige and confidence aroused by such a coup, we might have carried the Stormberg position with comparative ease upon the following day. The fact is, the enemy made a false move, and we failed to make him pay any penalty for his error. We had an opportunity and lost it. That we might be offered such another was scarcely within the bounds of possibility, nor did anything of the sort recur.

Meanwhile, it seems certain that the Boers did not resolve to incur so much risk without some cogent reason, and the question naturally arises: What was their real object? Now, it is a curious fact that just at this time the local Boers, who were rebels in heart or act almost to a man, had been continually coming forward with warnings of impending attacks upon Bushman's Hoek, both before and since the actual descent made against the police camps. All this voluntary information certainly was not given through any desire to assist us. The probability is that the seeming solicitude for our security, so obligingly displayed, as well as the half-hearted attack actually delivered, were intended to throw dust in our eyes, and by rendering us anxious for our own safety to prevent

any forward move upon our part. The Boers, in short, endeavoured to envelop us in a "fog-of-war," in the hope that whilst we were groping in it they might be free to carry out some manœuvre behind it. What I wrote at the time reads as follows: "That manœuvre probably is an expedition westwards to aid their friends now opposed to General French about Colesberg. My impression is that we shall very soon hear of very important developments in that direction. Whether we shall take any steps to prevent the exercise of such pressure upon French remains to be seen. In any case, our potentiality depends in a great measure upon how we may just now be served by the agents of the Intelligence Department. Assuming, for example, that the departure of a Boer column from Stormberg for Colesberg became known to us in good time, and that we could also assure the receipt of accurate information regarding the progress of its march, we might not impossibly find and seize an opportunity to capture Stormberg; but, in any case, we should certainly make a tentative demonstration sufficient to draw back the pressure from French. That we are absolutely bound to do all in our power to co-operate with French, even at the cost of incurring some considerable risk, is perfectly clear—provided, of course, that the enemy's movements eventually justify the predictions made regarding them. For us to attack Stormberg with our present force, unless the enemy has detached a portion of his strength elsewhere, would be absurd. But if the Boers actually detach troops against French, then we

should probably be justified in attacking; or if they remain as they are, then it is clearly our duty to demonstrate, in order to keep them fast."

On the morning of January 8th the "Derbys" and other troops, with artillery, moved up towards Molteno for use if required, in order to cover the removal of some grain that still remained at the mills. A Boer scout fired a couple of shots at 2500 yards, but otherwise there was no excitement. Meanwhile, I amused myself by once more riding over the scene of Wednesday's engagement, where I was at hand in case of a collision at Molteno, about four miles distant, and at the same time more profitably employed than had I been kicking my heels at the Molteno Railway Station. There was a terrific thunderstorm in the afternoon, and we all got thoroughly drenched.

CHAPTER XI.

CHIEFLY REFLECTIONS.

THE following extracts from my journal will give an idea of the general run of affairs at the time, and also show what I thought about them. That I was mistaken in some of my predictions, the actual march of events has since proved.

"*January* 9.—Further information which I obtained to-day from a British 'refugee' goes to confirm the theory that the Stormberg commando has already or will shortly send a detachment against French. There is, however, no certainty, for the excellent reason that our patrols do not keep touch of the enemy. When De Montmorency's 'Scouts' have commenced work in the Stormberg direction we shall, in future, be kept better informed regarding Boer movements, and the latter will know less about ours. De Montmorency returns from Queenstown to-morrow morning, and hopes to bring with him sufficient remounts to make good his losses about Dordrecht. As soon as he has the means, he will speedily utilize them, and I hope that it may be my good fortune to be with him on his next important adventure. I would not for worlds have

missed the three days' reconnaissance near Dordrecht the week before last.

"The Divisional Boxing Tournament commenced in Sterkstroom camp to-day, and promises well. Captain Broadley of the Royal Scots is the moving spirit, and has managed everything most excellently. He was fortunate in securing a very competent referee in Captain Bushe, late of the Queen's Bays, whose decisions have so far had the somewhat unusual merit of giving universal satisfaction.

"*January* 10.—I hear, on fairly reliable authority, that Commandant Grobelär, whose brother is already engaged against French in the Colesberg district, has actually left Stormberg for Colesberg with 1000 men. Nothing is more likely, but as there is no official confirmation of the rumour, I have not as yet thought it desirable to cable this intelligence. If it be true that Grobelär has indeed gone, then a very important move has been made, and may not improbably exercise a very serious influence upon the situation. General French has hitherto done extremely well with the very small force at his disposal, and, until the unfortunate disaster to the Suffolk Regiment, his operations have been uniformly successful. Now, however, if he is sharply attacked, after the enemy's reinforcements have arrived, a serious reverse seems by no means improbable. Activity upon the part of the 3rd Division is in my opinion most necessary, but so far as I can gather there does not seem to be the least prospect of our attempting anything whatever. Nothing could be

easier than for us to harass the Stormberg garrison, if only it were decided to send infantry to Pen Hoek, and thus release the greater part of the mounted troops now idly sitting there, concerned chiefly about their own safety and doing little or nothing else. Considering that we have not less than 800 mounted men, it seems ridiculous that the question of whether 1000 Boers have or have not quitted Stormberg should ever have been in doubt. Clearly, however, so long as our men are camped at such great distances from the Boer positions, it is impossible for them to patrol the country, continuously, in an efficient manner. It is the business of the infantry to occupy well-selected tactical positions to be used as strategical pivots for the mounted troops. Such a post ought to be established near Molteno, dominating that town, and at least 500 mounted men should be kept actively employed in the surrounding country, with this fortified post as the base of their operations. Supposing the Boers to make an attempt to capture the position, so much the better. The one thing of all others that we desire is, that the enemy shall come out of his fastnesses, and try conclusions with us upon ground that he has not prepared for defence. Should the enemy so act, he could scarcely avoid giving us sundry opportunities. Therefore we would do well to offer him bait sufficiently attractive to draw him—provided that we, at the same time, are careful to dangle only such morsels as he cannot comfortably swallow. Far be it from me to recommend dissemination of force as a general principle, but for our present

purpose the occupation of an advanced strategical position, by a small force within reasonable reach of support from the main body, would make just this difference to our present situation, that whereas we are now impotent to adopt any aggressive plan of action, we should become capable of so doing from the moment that our mounted troops possessed a *pied à terre* within striking distance of our opponents' laagers. To maintain patrols constantly in touch of the enemy at Stormberg, when the nearest haven of safety is Bushman's Hoek, some nineteen miles distant, is quite impossible, and it is perfectly obvious that unless the patrol duty is done thoroughly, and reconnaissance made with reasonable frequency, we cannot be kept informed of what the enemy is doing, and the enemy himself will moreover continue free to do exactly as he pleases.

"We hear rumours of strong reinforcements being sent to this part of the theatre of war, but I disbelieve them entirely. Our probable fate is to continue 'marking time' until either Ladysmith or Kimberley has been relieved. Afterwards, reinforcements might indeed be sent here, merely to make a 'show,' but I greatly doubt anything remaining for them to do this side of the Transvaal border, if then. The victories that must be won in order to make us masters of Kimberley and Ladysmith will be of so decisive a character, that when these have been accomplished there will be very little more fighting to be done upon a large scale. After the Boers covering the siege of Kimberley have been defeated, the fall of Bloemfontein and the submission of the Orange

Free State will follow within ten days. Concentration of the British forces on the Kimberley and Ladysmith lines, with a view to prompt and decisive action, is absolutely necessary. Therefore we shall receive no considerable reinforcements to the skeleton of the 3rd Division just at present. Had a really strong force been at first collected for a single effort either in Natal or the Cape Colony, there would have been no disasters, much less loss of life, and a successful issue to the war within a very brief period of time. We have instead been weak everywhere, and consequently beaten everywhere. The few successes that we have won have been purely tactical.

"*January* 11.—The 3rd Division Boxing Tournament was continued yesterday, and brought to a conclusion this morning. The results of the 'finals' were as follows:—

"Feather Weights: Private Connolly, Sherwood Foresters, and Private Platt, Sherwood Foresters, were so evenly matched that a 'draw' was the only possible decision.

"Light Weights: Corporal Bray, A.S.C., beat Private Marshall, Kaffrarian Rifles.

"Middle Weights: Private Holmes, Sherwood Foresters, beat Corporal Dutton, Royal Scots, after a very tough fight.

"Heavy Weights: Private Brown, Royal Scots, beat Private Rawson, Sherwood Foresters. Rawson had injured his wrist during a very heavy contest on the previous day, and what had otherwise promised to be

the most exciting event of the meeting consequently resulted in Rawson's withdrawal during the second round. The pair were well matched, and both men good boxers.

"Sir William Gatacre gave away the prizes.

"The Royal Scots were exercised at field-firing this morning. The oftener I see field-firing the more convinced I become that, although a valuable and indeed almost indispensable item of company training, its application to battalions or larger bodies is absurd. The use of field-firing is to give practice to section commanders in the control of fire in accordance with observed results. Reality, in the tactical schemes propounded for field-firing exercises, has never yet been attained. The fact that there are bullets in the rifles renders it invariably necessary to leave undone many things that ought to be done, and to do many things that in a real action would be impossible—or at all events ridiculous. So far as such things *can* be well done, the Royal Scots succeeded very well indeed. Their fighting efficiency seems to be of no mean order.

"*January* 13.—At present we have at Sterkstroom the 74th, 77th, and 79th Batteries of Field Artillery, the 1st Battalion Royal Scots, the 1st Battalion Derbyshire Regiment, the 12th Company Royal Engineers, and about 300 Mounted Infantry and Colonial mounted troops. We have also the wreck of the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, and about 500 Kaffrarian Rifles stationed at Bushman's Hoek; as well as some 700 more mounted troops divided between that place, Pen Hoek, and other stations.

The main body of the Cape Mounted Rifles, under Colonel Dalgety, is to a limited extent under Sir William's orders, and if these two squadrons be added, the grand total of our mounted strength rises to about 1200 men.

"At first sight it may appear as if 1200 mounted men should be capable of doing a great deal; but this is not so under the actual conditions prevailing. Had we even one more battalion of infantry, to be utilized in order to hold fortified posts as pivots for the mounted troops, then indeed something satisfactory might be undertaken; but so long as the protection of their own camps is added to their patrol duties, etc., it is clear that the available fighting strength of the mounted corps must remain subject to an immense reduction.

"In my own opinion this state of stagnation could easily be remedied by strongly fortifying the two kopjes on the immediate west of this camp, so that the vast accumulation of stores could as safely be guarded by one battalion as by two, and infantry be thus set free for the duties at the front already indicated. The responsible authorities seem, however, to entertain a different opinion—with regrettable results.

"For example. Yesterday a Boer commando about 300 strong was in position, within three miles of Bird's River, where Colonel Dalgety is encamped with two squadrons of the Cape Mounted Rifles. The enemy had advanced from the neighbourhood of Dordrecht, and had with him a working party which proceeded to reap the crops of sundry rebel farmers. Dalgety

elected to sit still, without offering any opposition whatever, simply because, after deducting an adequate garrison to defend his camp, he considered that the residue represented so weak a force that seriously engaging the enemy became impossible. That such conditions should prevail is altogether wrong. Not only should we be ready and eager to pounce upon the enemy upon any occasion when he ventures from his strongholds, but, more than this, our correct policy is to be ubiquitous in worrying him with patrols and reconnaissances. For us to sit still just now and do nothing must certainly be attended by calamitous results to General French's column, upon which the enemy will be enabled to concentrate his efforts. A step in the right direction has been taken to-day by the despatch of a patrol of fifty Frontier Mounted Rifles towards Steynsburg, where they will join hands with the Colonial troops of French's column who are now at that place. But this is not enough. It behoves us to distract the enemy as much as possible by unexpected blows in widely different directions. Dordrecht, for instance, should be re-occupied to the extent of putting its garrison and the covering force to flight, or capturing one or both if we can. Through some error, the origin of which I have been unable to ascertain, the previous combination, which should have resulted in the capture of the Dordrecht commando, failed to fulfil its purpose. De Montmorency, indeed, drove the Boers helter-skelter into the town, through which they fled—not, as intended, into the hostile arms of Colonel

Dalgety and his Cape Mounted Rifles, but into the friendly bosom of the neighbouring mountains. Next morning, when Dalgety at length reached Dordrecht, not a Boer remained within seven miles of the place, and his march had therefore a fruitless result. Had he been twelve hours sooner, at least 200 prisoners would have fallen into his hands.

"*January* 14.—To-day I rode over to Pen Hoek, a strong position astride of the Queenstown-Jamestown road and about sixteen miles distant from the Sterkstroom camp. There has of late been much talk of an impending attack upon Pen Hoek, and I was anxious to see what arrangements had been made for the defence of this important pass. The key of the position is the bold kopje on the west of the road, and its weakness a ridge about 3500 yards to the northwards, upon which the enemy's guns would certainly be formidable, whilst the 7-pounders of the Cape Mounted Rifles would, at that range, be at the mercy of the superior weapons of the Boers. To meet this difficulty I was glad to see that gun-pits had been dug on the slope of the hill about 500 yards nearer to the opposite ridge, and here two of the 7-pounders had been placed, whilst the other four are securely entrenched on the commanding summit of the kopje. Shelter-trenches and 'schanzes' have been made in all directions, every avenue of approach being excellently commanded. Three squadrons of Brabant's Horse are responsible for the eastern kopje, and, so long as the western is successfully held, they should have no difficulty whatever in

maintaining a successful defence. In short, if natural strength aided by judicious improvements can avail anything, Pen Hoek is impregnable against any attack that the Boers are capable of delivering. I should say that Pen Hoek is stronger in every way than Bushman's Hoek, and its importance even greater. By capturing Bushman's Hoek the enemy would place a very serious obstacle in the way of our future advance, as well as striking a heavy blow against the very limited stock of prestige that yet remains to us. But by gaining possession of Pen Hoek, the Boers would turn our right flank, and thus obtain a good road to Queenstown and our communications—so that, unless we could instantly retake the position, a retrograde movement would be inevitable. The loss of either of these posts would be such a calamity that the Stormberg disaster itself would be a mere nothing in comparison with it.

"Strong as the Pen Hoek position undeniably is, and sanguine as I am that its present garrison could defend it against any attack, there is one serious drawback that it is impossible to ignore. The garrison consists entirely of mounted troops, whose horses would be in great danger in the event of any serious effort upon the part of the enemy. To place the horses out of reach of fire would no doubt be possible, but the question of watering and feeding them would present serious difficulties. The water supply for animals is provided by a large pond, nearly two miles off, and certainly unapproachable in face of the enemy. I have previously expressed the opinion that an infantry garrison should

be provided, but the very cogent reason for this, to which I have now referred, had not then occurred to me. There should be infantry to hold the position, leaving the mounted troops free to detach themselves from it and to act against the flanks and rear of the assailants. It is, moreover, a great mistake, in almost any circumstances, to allow mounted troops to become bottled up in a beleaguered place. The business of such troops is to clear out before it is too late, and assist the defenders left within, by harassing the enemy from without. Mounted infantry are superior to other infantry only so long as they retain their powers of increased mobility, and this when they are shut up in a small post is at once sacrificed. To use mounted infantry to hold fortifications is pure waste of material better suited to more active employment.

"*January* 15.—Another of the many false alarms was given last night, and in consequence of it the Royal Scots, with half the Derbyshires and the artillery and mounted troops, proceeded by road and rail this morning to protect Molteno against an attack said to be pending. As a matter of course, the enemy made no sign; but as I learned that De Montmorency had obtained permission to sleep at Molteno, I proceeded thither with every confidence that the morrow would bring forth a certain amount of excitement.

"*January* 16.—Absolute need of rest for both men and horses prevented an early start, but at about 8 a.m. the "Scouts" moved off in the direction of Stormberg, using a little-frequented road, which, after passing

through an extremely odoriferous Kaffir location to the eastward, finally turns north and west towards Stormberg at a distance of about two miles and a half from the Rooikop. We proceeded without any adventures, until, after passing Goosen's farm, our advanced scouts ascended a rising ground, under the eastern edge of which the road began its bend northwards, after passing on its right a lofty kopje, from which, afterwards, we obtained a view which well rewarded us for the trouble of climbing it. Upon the rising ground referred to, and securely concealed amongst the rocks, was a Boer grazing-picquet, who allowed the scouts to approach within two hundred yards before declaring their presence by a ragged volley, which was so marvellously ill-directed that not a man or horse was hit. This reception naturally caused us to retire a few hundred yards to a friendly ridge, where the situation was offered time to develop itself. The enemy, however, made no sign, although so far as his opportunities for observation went, no more than half a score Britishers were before him, our tiny main body having kept out of sight. The number of Boers was probably a dozen or thereabouts, and we might easily have ousted them had we felt so disposed; but the object for which De Montmorency had come out was not to fight unnecessarily but to reconnoitre. Accordingly, therefore, the commander of the "Scouts" was content to place his men so that they could temporarily check any advance by the enemy, whilst he himself seized the opportunity to ascend the kopje already mentioned. From this point

of vantage the entire stretch of country up to the Stormberg position lay before us, whilst to our right front was Schoeman's farm, where a large commando had been reported to be encamped. Of this commando there was no trace whatever, nor was any laager elsewhere visible. On the hillsides near Stormberg about three hundred horses and perhaps four hundred oxen were grazing, but on the alarm caused by the firing, mounted Boers were already busy 'rounding them up.' There was no sign of any movement against ourselves. Two or three Boers galloped down to the picquet which had fired at us—no doubt to inquire into the matter, but otherwise nothing was done. Six men were seen on a ridge west of Schoeman's farm, about a thousand yards to our front, and these after a time rode down to the farm itself. Having seen all that there was to be seen, and being convinced that whilst a nearer approach directly on Stormberg would yield no advantage it would certainly be dangerous, De Montmorency decided that he could best singe the Boer's beard by a raid on Schoeman's farm, which was accordingly searched for arms, but without result. Two of the six men proved to be 'suspects' resident in Molteno; but as no rifles could be found, nor was there sufficient evidence against any of the party, it was decided not to arrest them. When leaving the farm, De Montmorency inquired of the Boers 'how far they intended to let him get away before firing on him.' To this question they replied volubly that no such intention was in their minds, nor indeed could they do anything of the sort, having no

weapons. However, very shortly after our departure these innocent farmers were on a convenient kopje firing away at us most merrily—and harmlessly.

"Whilst all this was going on, the Cape Police, under Major Neyland, had arrived on the scene, and knowing more about Mr. Schoeman than we did, promptly drove off a considerable number of his horses and cattle. Awkward complications were, however, by this time developing, and the sound of firing on our left warned us that it was time to 'clear.' The Boers on the ridge had gradually been reinforced by perhaps a couple of hundred men, and commenced to make a half-hearted attempt to cut us off. Had they been more enterprising we might have had trouble, but they contented themselves with firing a great many rounds at long ranges, to which our men replied somewhat less vigorously, but yet with sufficient effect to keep the enemy in check during our retirement from ridge to ridge. So heavy was the fire at one time that people in Molteno became seriously alarmed, and telegrams were sent to Sterkstroom and Bushman's Hoek, with the result that the armoured train arrived just as all was over, and a battery with some mounted infantry marched rapidly from Bushman's Hoek, nearly as far as Molteno, only to return, disappointed, whence they had come. The Scouts and Police regained Molteno without man or horse being scratched, but a patrol of the latter, which revisited the scene of the action an hour later, was rewarded by the sight of a Boer stretcher-party with a white flag; from which we may conclude that the

enemy sustained at least one casualty. Thus ended a most successful little reconnaissance. The information gained was, that if the enemy still has a strong force about Stormberg, the greater part must be encamped upon the far side of the hills, *i.e.* to the north of the station; and secondly, that the report as to a commando being on Schoeman's farm was absolutely untrue. The object with which such reports were furnished by pretended 'loyalists' was probably to throw dust in our eyes, so as to conceal the detachment of a commando to operate against French. It is a thousand pities that, for want of men, the General is not now in a position to make a reconnaissance in force, with the intention of converting it into a serious attack, in the event of the enemy's defence proving to be weak.

"The view I had of Stormberg, when with De Montmorency on the look-out kopje, has convinced me that to attack the position the proper course is for the assault to be given from the east, along the ridge of the Rooi Kop, which rises gently, in waves, for about two miles; whilst a strong containing line should make a vigorous frontal demonstration from the south, with its principal strength to the west of the main road. This demonstration should be arranged so that the troops should be in position shortly before daylight, in order that their advance should not be exposed to the enemy's artillery. The inferior range of our guns makes it imperative that they should attain positions near enough to ensure effective fire. I need scarcely add that whilst the infantry and artillery assailed the

enemy in front and flank, the mounted infantry and irregular horse should work round towards the rear. The strength of the Stormberg position has, I think, been exaggerated. Instead of a position complete in itself, there is a series of positions, requiring a large force to hold them; and the loss of the Rooi Kop would probably involve the loss of the remainder.

"*January* 17.—On my return from Molteno this morning I learned that the Royal Irish Rifles have received a strong draft, including several volunteers from 'section D,' and secondly that the Derbyshires are to relieve the Rifles at Bushman's Hoek; probably in order that Colonel Smith-Dorrien of the former corps may be given a semi-independent command, without detaching him from his battalion. Bushman's Hoek is, moreover, an important position, with a garrison which will soon amount to some 2000 men, including the Kaffrarians on the Loperberg; and an officer of rank is clearly required. Hitherto, Major Maxwell, R.E., has been commandant.

"To my great delight, I observed that two batteries of artillery are at the Hoek, where they are, apparently, to remain for the present. There are two great advantages in this arrangement. In the first place, the horses will enjoy excellent grazing, and, secondly, they will no longer be obliged to drag the guns up that terrible hill every time that artillery is despatched to the front.

"By the English mail which arrived during my absence at Molteno, came newspapers up to December 23, and containing the casualty list of the

Colenso disaster, which we thus see for the first time. No one in authority has troubled his head to consider that troops in this country have relatives and friends engaged with other columns besides their own. The information given as to operations elsewhere is always most meagre. For example, all that we at Sterkstroom yet know about the second attack on Ladysmith is that there was desperate fighting, certain positions being several times taken and retaken, with heavy losses on both sides. We have received no particulars —not even the list of officers killed and wounded. I need scarcely say that great dissatisfaction is felt and expressed. Naturally, we assume that such reticence covers something that needs to be concealed, and this same assumption gives encouragement to the Colonial rebels—with most mischievous results.

"*January* 18.—It is reported this morning that the Dordrecht commando has blown up several culverts on the line from Sterkstroom to that place; but, so far, no official confirmation has been received from Colonel Dalgety at Bird's River Siding.

"*January* 19.—The Derbyshires marched this morning to Bushman's Hoek and relieved the Royal Irish Rifles, who returned to this camp. It is said that Colonel Smith-Dorrien has been given a 'free hand;' but this seems doubtful, since, from all accounts, Sir William Gatacre being himself very strictly tied down by orders from headquarters, is not in a position to delegate liberty of action which he does not himself possess.

"*January* 20.—Lieutenant Nickerson, R.A.M.C., the doctor who has been attending to the wounded at Stormberg and elsewhere, returned to camp this morning. From his account, the Boers behaved well, both to the wounded British officers and soldiers, and also to himself. Upon the other hand, the conduct of certain Colonial rebels was disgraceful. Lieut.-Colonel Eager, of the Royal Irish Rifles, who, as will be remembered, had been terribly wounded by a shell, was conveyed to a farmhouse, where Dr. Nickerson attended to his injuries and hoped that his patient would be allowed a little rest. But it was not to be. The rebel owner of the farm returned with a number of companions, and in spite of Dr. Nickerson's entreaties, insisted upon the instant removal of the wounded man, who was accordingly placed on an ox-waggon, which, jolting terribly over the vile roads, nearly shook him to pieces. That farmer's name is Van Zyl, and when the time comes for adjudicating upon the cases of the various Colonial Dutch who have thrown in their lot with the enemy, it is to be hoped that the behaviour of this inhuman wretch will not be forgotten.

"From this abominable incident it is pleasant to turn to the truly noble and patriotic conduct of the British inhabitants of Burghersdorp, which was certainly 'beyond all praise.'

"*January* 21.—So little is occurring in our immediate neighbourhood that our attention is now engaged chiefly with the operations elsewhere. The news from Natal is most encouraging, and everything seems to point to

a Boer Sedan * within the next few days. That the investing and covering forces of the enemy round and about Ladysmith may succeed in making good their retreat, leaving their artillery and stores behind them, is not improbable; but that they can escape as an army seems most unlikely. All depends, of course, upon the distance northwards and eastwards that Warren and Clery may be enabled to accomplish before the Boers decide upon bolting. Van Reenen's Pass is already closed, we might almost say; and it remains only to intervene further north so as to command also the route to Laing's Nek, in order to ensure that although men and horses may still escape *viâ* Dundee and Wakkerstroom, everything else must fall into our hands. The perfect consummation would of course be that the greater part of the Boer forces may be obliged to surrender. Should this happen, the end of the war will have approached within easily measurable distance.

"Next to the progress of the army in Natal, the matter which chiefly exercises our minds is the reorganization of everything upon Egyptian lines that is at present going forward. That the Omdurman campaign, and the preparatory operations that preceded it, afford undeniable proof that a thoroughly sound system prevailed is well known; yet it does not therefore follow that what was good in Egypt will necessarily prove equally suitable in South Africa. For example, the practice of decentralization in the transport service

* News of the Spion Kop disaster was shortly to bring a rude awakening from these pleasant dreams.

has stood the test of successive campaigns in this country ever since it was employed in absolute perfection by Sir Evelyn Wood with his 'Flying Column' in Zululand. Under the regimental system, every squadron and company has been a self-contained unit, capable of immediate detachment at any moment, with its reserve ammunition and rations, and everything else complete. This arrangement is now abolished, and all transport is to be permanently centralized under the responsible officer of the divisional staff. It is difficult to see how improved efficiency can result from this change, and certainly, until the new machine gets into proper working order, difficulties are pretty sure to arise. Where the means of regimental transport is a drove of grunting, evil-smelling camels—that as soon as their daily task has been completed, every one wishes to have removed from range of sight, hearing, and scent—then, indeed, the centralized system is preferable. But where wagons drawn by mules or oxen are used to convey the company-baggage and equipment, the case is totally different, since the wagon provides a sort of mobile store in which everything not for the moment required can be left in safety without any trouble about packing or unpacking. For example, the reserve provisions and ammunition having once been packed on a company wagon will never need to be again handled during the campaign unless an emergency calling for their use should actually arise.

"*January* 22.—Rumours are plentiful, and even more so than usual, about an impending attack upon this

column by the Stormberg commando. There is very little doubt that the tales which so continually reach our ears are circulated by the Boers themselves, simply in order to try and frighten us into leaving them alone. At the same time it is not absolutely impossible that a deep-laid scheme is hatching, and that some day an attack may actually be delivered when they think that we have been educated into a belief that no information as to their intention to attack can by any chance be true. It would not do at all for us to absolutely ignore what we hear, but at the same time we need to do no more than to be always ready, and never for a moment to allow any relaxation in the vigilance and frequency of our patrols.

"*January* 23.—This afternoon I rode up to Bushman's Hoek, and was delighted to find that, with the exception of three companies, the troops have all been moved forward to the ridges south of Phillips's farm, where there is an excellent camping ground on a position that is practically secure against any attack. The right is protected by the Loperberg, which is occupied by the Kaffrarian Rifles, whilst on the left there is a perfect glacis, over which no troops could possibly advance and survive. In front the ridges have been crowned by a breastwork with sandbag loop-holes, and unless the enemy succeeded in gaining the eastern heights, in face of artillery fire from the Bushman's Hoek redoubts and the Loperberg, it seems to me that the troops would do well to accept battle at their camp without any idea of retiring to Bushman's Hoek itself. In any case, it is

most undesirable that men should get into the habit of thinking that an entrenched position is essential to their safety; and that such a feeling should arise is inevitable if they are allowed to remain boxed up for any length of time. Moreover, the camping-ground within the area of the Bushman's Hoek position has been occupied for a very long time, so that, in spite of the beautiful air and every other natural advantage, it could not have continued healthy for an indefinite period. Between the Derbyshires and Bushman's Hoek, two batteries are encamped, and on the eastern side of the road the mounted infantry. It was most satisfactory to notice a considerable improvement in the condition of the artillery horses, although it would have been most surprising had this not been apparent where grass, water, and climate are all so favourable. The water, indeed, might be cleaner, but it is at hand and plentiful. Perhaps, however, even the local advantages already enumerated have had better results than might otherwise have been the case, in consequence of the horses being now spared the great tax upon their strength that was formerly entailed by constantly dragging guns and wagons up the steep hill to Bushman's Hoek as often as some ephemeral suspicion of danger called them from Sterkstroom.

"*January* 24.—The patrol of Brabant's Horse, under Captain Flanigan, which was despatched from here to Steynsburg ten days ago, returned to camp this morning after having successfully accomplished its task, which was to gain touch of other troops detached

eastwards by General French. The object of this move was, I understand, to impose upon the Boer commanders by leading them to expect joint action against Stormberg by French and Gatacre; and there seems to be every reason to believe that the desired result was actually attained. At all events, a movement towards Colesberg by a commando from about Bethulie appears to have been arrested.

"*January* 25.—News received this morning that British troops have occupied Thebus, fourteen miles west of Steynsburg. The intention was to repair the railway, gradually, in the direction of Stormberg."

CHAPTER XII.

THE COLONIAL DIVISION AND A VISIT TO EAST LONDON.

"*January* 27.—Yesterday nothing happened that is worth recording. The Royal Scots marched this morning to Pen Hoek, and there is every reason for satisfaction at this most desirable, although somewhat tardy recognition of the fact that one of the primary duties of infantry in this war is to furnish 'Pivots of Manœuvre' for their more mobile comrades in arms. Obviously, so long as the mounted troops are compelled to reserve a portion of their strength for the defence of the various advanced posts occupied by them, the numbers available for reconnaissance and reconnoitring must necessarily be reduced in proportion; whilst, upon the contrary, if adequately supported by infantry, they can devote their entire attention to the special operations which they may be called upon to undertake. The acceptance of this principle should yield good results in the immediate future, more especially as in Brigadier-General Brabant, who has been appointed to the command of the 'Colonial Division,' Sir William Gatacre will have the assistance of a thoroughly experienced and well-tried leader of irregular horse. The name of

'Brabant' is one to conjure with in this part of the colony, and is well known and respected in every other district. His military reputation, which has been right well earned, as well as his personal popularity, pointed to Colonel Brabant as the man of all others, both from a military and from a political point of view, to be selected for the important command which he now holds.

"Brigadier-General Brabant arrived in camp this morning from Cape Town, and after a consultation with General Gatacre, left in the afternoon for Queenstown, where his headquarters are temporarily established, pending final arrangements for a forward movement. By the same train I also travelled, *en route* to East London, which, as it is the sea base of this column, I have long been anxious to visit.

"*January* 28.—I reached East London this morning, after a very tedious and uncomfortable journey, the train being two hours late, and the carriages very bad. Only one sleeping car remains on this line, all others having gone to Cape Town before the Boers occupied Stormberg; hence our troubles. A more complete transformation than that which has been worked at East London since I was last here, it is impossible to imagine. In February, 1876, I landed for a couple of hours when journeying, coastwise, from Cape Town to Durban, and at that time the town of East London, as it now stands, had practically no existence. The railway had not been opened, and the village, for it was then no more, consisted for the most part of corrugated

iron huts, situated on the south side of the Buffalo River. The modern town has since grown up on the northern bank, and is admirably laid out with fine broad streets, and not a few handsome public and other buildings. There are excellent and very extensive stores, good shops, and hotels.

"On the afternoon of my arrival (Sunday), I accompanied a party of the naval and military staff on a boating expedition up the river to a very pretty spot about two and a half miles distant, where we boiled a kettle and made tea, after the most approved fashion of home picnics on the Dart, Tavy, or other familiar rivers. The boat used by us had been kindly lent by the harbour-master, and is a first-class craft built by Salter. To see such a boat out here was a considerable surprise, and a row in it a real joy. Our pleasure was, however, short lived. On our return to East London the sad news from the Tugela was not long in reaching us. Previously, everything had looked bright, and our only anxiety had been for early news of the relief of Ladysmith—which we had imagined to be a matter of hours. The abandonment of the hardly-won position on Spion Kop, and the subsequent retreat of Sir Redvers Buller's force came as a terrible and wholly unexpected blow. Truly the British Army has been ill-served by fortune during this war. Many errors have indeed been committed, but their influence has been as nothing in comparison with that of sheer bad luck. However, success, when at last we have won it, will be the more valuable triumph, dearly bought as it will indeed have

been. The only ray of hope that remains in reference to the assumed calamity that has just been reported, lies in the possibility that the flank attack in this particular instance was merely intended as a demonstration, and that startling intelligence of success achieved elsewhere may suddenly reach us. It is at least natural to wonder at the operations of which we have heard being unaccompanied by any other action, and it is almost inconceivable that such can have been actually the case. With a comparatively large force at his disposal, Sir Redvers Buller would scarcely have relied only upon the turning movement attempted by a detachment. Some combination there must have been; but the question is yet to be decided as to whether the failure of the entire enterprise has followed from the fighting at Spion Kop, or whether the latter was a mere incident by which the general result remains unaffected.

"*January* 29.—To-day I visited the *Trojan*, where our sick and wounded appear to be thoroughly well looked after and to be most comfortable. The ship is excellently fitted up, and the patients are provided with every comfort that they could enjoy in a first-rate hospital on land. Several of our Stormberg wounded were on board, all doing well, and some expecting permission to rejoin their corps within the next few days.

"Whilst on board the *Trojan* I had the somewhat mixed enjoyment of watching the *Fearless* start for Port Elizabeth, with the *Barossa* detachment of the

Naval Brigade, and the two 4·7 naval guns, which we have for some time been fondly expecting to welcome at Sterkstroom. These guns have now gone to our neighbours at Colesberg, and with them have taken away our hopes of doing something decisive against the Stormberg Boers. Probably we have but little right to complain, since it is obvious that the important point at present is that where Generals Kelly-Kenny and French are now operating, and the most that we can do here is to act in combination, so as to favour their movements. The moral effect of a strong counter-stroke is sorely needed, and the opportunities for this are greater about Colesberg than in this part of the country. Yet it is none the less aggravating that we should be the unlucky column whose needs are necessarily sacrificed in favour of others.

"*January* 31.—I quitted East London yesterday, and returned to Sterkstroom this morning. General Brabant is still at Queenstown, and apparently his projected movement to the front has been delayed, although, I hope, not for long. Little as we may be capable of undertaking at present, it is none the less most desirable that we should not be inactive. Our policy is to 'worry' the enemy, whilst avoiding any danger of committing ourselves to any perilous enterprise. 'Fabian tactics' do not mean 'masterly inactivity,' but the contrary. What we need to do is to treat the enemy to a series of homœopathic doses, whilst carefully preventing him from retaliating with more drastic measures. This we shall soon be attending to, and

when a fair start has been made, we shall, I trust, effect some good results. The Northumberland Fusiliers, who have received a strong draft from home, have returned to camp from East London, and the Royal Irish Rifles have also been reinforced, so that we now have four excellent battalions, two of which, the Rifles and the Fusiliers, are present in camp, available for any special enterprise. The Royal Scots and the Derbyshires are at Pen Hoek and Bushman's Hoek respectively.

"*February* 1.—About 1000 head of cattle and sheep have been captured by the Cape Police from rebels in the Dordrecht district, and arrived in camp this morning. Sir Redvers Buller's despatch to the Governor unfortunately dispels any lingering hope that the success of the recent operations about the Tugela may not have been prevented by the failure to hold the Spion Kop. Evidently a fresh start is necessary.

"*February* 2.—This morning I received a wire from Amery, instructing me to proceed to Rensburg. Fortunately, a good opportunity is at my disposal, and I shall start to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIII.

A GLIMPSE OF RENSBURG UNDER MAJOR-GENERAL CLEMENTS.

I ARRIVED at Rensburg from Sterkstroom on February 8, having marched with Dewar's and Amphlett's companies of mounted infantry, *viâ* Maraisburg, to Thebus, where I took train to Naauwpoort, and thence to Rensburg. The march, which commenced on the 3rd, was uneventful but very interesting. Much of the country was most difficult, and constantly suggesting reasons for thankfulness that the enemy offered no opposition. The pass at Eland's River Poort struck me as one of the most formidable places I had ever seen, and was, moreover, marvellously beautiful. For some four miles the road followed the river between precipitous cliffs, whose rugged slopes and heights were sparsely covered with bush of the universal type. Twenty-five resolute men could have held us in check for a week with scarcely any danger to themselves. At our midday outspan, about four miles clear of the poort, we were joined by a sergeant-major and six men of the Army Service Corps, who had been sent after us from Sterkstroom. The adventures of this party are worth

narrating. On being despatched from Sterkstroom the sergeant-major was informed that the coloured mule-driver sent with the wagon was perfectly acquainted with the road, and was upon no account to be interfered with. Accordingly, when the wagon was driven in the direction of Molteno instead of *viâ* Carr Nek, the route employed by the mounted infantry, the sergeant-major raised no objection—nor even when, having passed through Molteno, the driver proceeded by the Steynsburg road, which passes close to the Boer positions on the kopjes round Stormberg Junction! The sergeant-major was in blissful ignorance, having never previously been so far north. Providentially, just as a Boer patrol hove in sight from the direction of Stormberg, a Cape Police patrol emerged from one of the various lurking-places of that usefully ubiquitous force. The result naturally was the return of the wagon and its passengers by the way that they had come until a safe road had been reached. Of these seven men, one had a carbine, three carried revolvers, and the remainder were entirely unarmed; so that, in the event of attack by even a very small patrol of the enemy, the result could scarcely have been in doubt. It does not seem desirable to trust so implicitly in coloured drivers as to disregard, even as a matter of form, roughly indicating to the soldiers concerned the general direction in which they are intended to travel.

At Maraisburg, where we arrived on Tuesday, the 6th, the men were entertained at tea by the ladies of the place, and numberless presents of fruit, etc., were made

to the officers. Here and elsewhere the British inhabitants were enthusiastically hospitable, and the contrast between these good people and their neighbours of Dutch origin was very striking. For example, for our sins, or rather for those of others, we spent the first night of the march at Pretorius' farm, fifteen miles from Sterkstroom. On the itinerary provided for Captain Dewar's guidance, a place five miles further on had been named as the halting-place. Providentially, in one sense, we learned that there was not a drop of water at the selected camping-ground, the drought being indeed so severe that the inhabitants of the farm there, whose name I forget, had been obliged to *trek*, bag and baggage, in order to save their cattle alive. Accordingly we remained at Pretorius' farm, to the great pecuniary advantage of the proprietor, who, not content with selling bread to the Government at sixpence per pound, also retailed coffee to the thirsty soldiers, on their arrival, at sixpence per cup—as well as other supplies in proportion.

At Thebus, where we arrived on Wednesday, the 7th inst., we found the "1st City," or Grahamstown Mounted Rifles, and a portion of the Uitenhage Infantry Volunteers, by both of whom we were hospitably entertained. Colonel Smith-Dorrien, of the Derbyshires, who had marched with us *en route* to join the 19th Brigade, of which he had been appointed Brigadier, at Orange River, was anxious to go on at once, and so also was I; but there were no horse-boxes at Thebus, nor could any be obtained from elsewhere. Accordingly

we decided to risk our horses in sheep-trucks as far as Naauwpoort, and fortunately arrived there, in course of time, without mishap. At Naauwpoort we obtained a couple of cattle-trucks, to which we transferred the horses, and so proceeded on our respective journeys.

The force remaining at Rensburg, under command of Major-General Clements, was small, and the front occupied extended for some twenty or more miles from the Maddock's, or New Zealand Hill, about twelve miles east of the camp, along an irregular line ending at Hopkirk's farm, about twelve miles nearly due north. At first sight this situation may seem precarious, but it must not be forgotten that the Boer positions opposite were equally extended, and at the time no more strongly garrisoned.

The opposing forces were constantly in touch, more especially where the Berkshire Regiment, holding McCracken's Hill, about two miles east of Coles Kop, were within six hundred yards of the Boers. Here "sniping" was going on from both sides all day and every day. The General would have no doubt been glad if his front had been better suited to the numbers under his command, but, for all that, I do not think that he felt, or needed to feel, any serious anxiety. Next morning I went early to Porter's Hill to see the howitzers tackle a Maxim-Vickers quick-firer, familiarly known as a "Pom-pom." Only two howitzers, the centre section of the 37th Field (Howitzer) Battery, under Lieutenant H. R. W. M. Smith, remained, the rest of

the battery having gone to Orange River. Yet even amongst this small detachment there was a notable personage, Gunner Walton, who laid the howitzer at Omdurman that was the first to send a shell into the Mahdi's tomb. At Rensburg Gunner Walton again distinguished himself by his excellent shooting. The target was small, and the range, 4500 yards, was beyond that at which the field howitzer is really reliable. "Pom-pom" was snugly secured in a stone emplacement, and from what I could make out the detachment belonging to him was provided with "head-cover." However, Gunner Walton succeeded in knocking the parapet about in a manner that must have been found extremely disagreeable by those holding the fort; and at 9.21, after an intermittent bombardment since 5.20 a.m., a shell seemed to me, and to other spectators, to have landed plump into the work. After this a few men were seen to clear out in haste; and afterwards, attempts to remove "Pom-pom" and his ammunition were made from the rear. Our men on the summit of Coles Kop were, however, on the look-out, and every move of the Boers was quickly wired to Lieutenant Smith from that commanding height. Consequently the enemy was at a considerable disadvantage. Out of twenty-nine shells that I observed, four failed to burst; but of the remaining twenty-five only five failed to hit or to go so close as to produce at least a very marked moral effect. At the same time, whilst I was out with the howitzers at Porter's Hill, a smart affair of outposts

was progressing merrily in the direction of Slingersfontein, and a certain amount of shooting was going on in various parts of the line. The correspondent of a Melbourne paper, who did not know the ground, wandered off looking round by himself, and was shot dead by some hidden enemy. One of the New Zealanders was also wounded. All things considered, the Rensburg camp appeared to be quite a lively place; but this is scarcely to be wondered at when it is remembered that the outposts of the opposing forces were within rifle-range of one another throughout the entire length of so long a line. The disaster to the Suffolk Regiment, which had occurred shortly before, was of course a most regrettable incident in itself, but, under all the circumstances, it seems more than doubtful that with the very limited forces remaining at the disposal of the general officer commanding, so advanced a post could have been retained in our possession. The Suffolk Hill is about two miles north-east of McCracken's Hill, and, whilst upon the one hand it commands the Boer line of retreat on Colesberg bridge, yet, upon the other, with our force too weak to seriously take the offensive, it would have been merely an isolated post which the Boers would certainly have striven hard to recapture, and which we ourselves should have had immense difficulty in supporting. A very long *détour* to the north would have been necessary in order to bring up reinforcements to the Suffolk Hill, or to provide the garrison with the needful supplies. Upon the whole,

I think that the Suffolk Hill would have been merely a white elephant to us, unless it had been possible to make immediate use of it in order to effect the discomfiture of the enemy's whole force. An advanced post, the approaches to which, upon both flanks, are not effectually commanded by the main position in rear, is almost always a source of weakness. In the present instance the direct line of approach was commanded, *by the enemy*, upon both flanks. Clearly, therefore, unless as a stepping-stone to an advance intended to follow instantly upon its capture, so isolated a position could not have been expected to yield any considerable advantages.

"*February* 10.—I had just settled down in my tent to write letters this morning after breakfast, when I learned that a convoy to Slingersfontein was about to start by the direct road across the open veldt, instead of by the somewhat circuitous route generally followed. I at once jumped to the erroneous conclusion that the convoy represented a 'bait,' and that troops had already been sent out with a view to catching the Boers in the open, in case they should attack it. Accordingly, I ordered my horse and accompanied the convoy, which, however, reached its destination without accident. The direct route had, it turned out, been selected only because it appeared to be quite safe, and, under the circumstances, it was but natural that the shorter route should be chosen. With this convoy marched the howitzers disguised as ox-wagons. The guns and limbers were covered with tarpaulins and

drawn by oxen, so that even from a very short distance they had the appearance of loaded wagons. Alongside rode the gunners and drivers ready to throw off the disguise, at any moment, in case of danger. In this, as in other matters, General Clements is following in the footsteps of his predecessor at Rensburg, General French, by providing daily some pretty little surprises for the enemy. The Boers would, no doubt, be keeping a sharp look-out for the howitzers; and had they seen them marching round to Slingers, would have been fully prepared against them; whereas, in the event, the lyddite shells dropping into their laagers was the first intimation they received that the howitzers had changed over from the opposite flank of the British positions. Personally, I did not witness the practice, but I am told that it was most effective.

"*February* 11.—Whilst the howitzers were engaged at Slingers, and further fighting was also proceeding in that neighbourhood, I had the good fortune to see a very pretty fight near Hopkirk's farm, about four miles north of Coles Kop, which is itself some eight miles north of Rensburg. Upon the previous day the enemy had rushed the picquet at the farm, and driven it back over the hill which rises abruptly to the west of Hopkirk's. At the same time another party of Boers drove in the picquet at Bastard's Nek, about three miles to the east. The hill at the rear of Hopkirk's was quickly recaptured by the Australians and a squadron of the Inniskillings, at the cost of three men killed. When I reached the kopje west of Hopkirk's, the

Australians had already dismounted and were skirmishing amongst the boulders against the Boers posted on the hills across the valley to the east of the farm, and the Inniskillings were behind a horseshoe spur under the northern face of the hill, awaiting their opportunity. About a mile in rear, sheltered by the hill, were four guns of the 4th Field Battery, under Major Butcher, just about to move forward into action. At 10.15 a.m. two guns opened fire from the highest point of the kopje against the precincts of the farm, and then against the opposite heights, whilst the remaining two, rather low down the southern slope, took charge of any Boers who might wish to support their comrades further in advance, and meanwhile occupied themselves well by throwing plenty of shrapnel amongst the latter. For two hours the cannonade went on, as well as the skirmishing among the rocks in front, but apparently without much result, and at 12.15 the guns limbered up and retired; the two on the south side being smartly peppered with rifle-fire during their retirement. Hopkirk's farm had, however, been re-occupied, the Boers having withdrawn. Things continuing quiet, I then rode off to Kloof Camp, the advanced position so long held by the Berkshire Regiment (left half battalion) near their fighting kopje, McCracken's Hill, the centre wedge driven by General French into the line of Boer positions. I was anxious to visit McCracken's Hill itself, but gave up the notion when it was explained to me that nobody had crossed, by day, between Kloof Camp and McCracken's for over six weeks. Experience

had proved that it was 'not good enough,' because the Boer sharpshooters on the opposite hill, called 'Anti-McCracken,' had a nasty way of showing their objection to such excursions. The four companies of the Berks interchange, by double companies, between McCracken's and the Kloof Camp at the expiration of forty-eight-hour tours of duty. The business of the McCrackenites is to shoot at any Boer who shows himself on Anti-McCracken or elsewhere. The enemy returns the natural rejoinder. Both sides are, however, so well under cover, or so quick in changing their positions, that the casualties are very few.

"*February* 12.—This morning I received a wire granting me permission to proceed to Orange River, which I accordingly did, about an hour and a half later. Glad as I was at the prospect of taking part in Lord Roberts' march to Bloemfontein, I was quite sorry to leave Rensburg, where life had many consolations from a correspondent's point of view. During my brief stay, only three clear days, with General Clements' force, I saw some kind of fight upon two out of the three; and although only small affairs, they were interesting to me. I had not previously been in front of a hostile pom-pom or behind a friendly howitzer in action.

"*February* 13.—I arrived at Orange River at 3 p.m., feeling very disconsolate. Arendse, Jess, and 'weagon' unlikely to follow for some days, and my personal kit and belongings very scanty indeed. Fortunately I obtained a tent through the kindness of Major Money,

R.A., the officer in charge of transport, and succeeded in making myself fairly comfortable.

"*February* 14.—The Warwickshire Regiment took pity upon my forlorn condition and asked me to lunch. They were most kind, and I felt perfectly at home with them from the first—indeed, it seemed almost as if I were back at Sterkstroom with the 5th Fusiliers and Royal Irish Rifles, to whom I can never be sufficiently grateful for their friendly hospitality. Colonel Quale-Jones appeared to have the same delight in talking 'shop' that I have myself, and we spent a very long time riding our favourite hobbies, to my great satisfaction, and, I hope, to his also. There was plenty to talk about; and naturally the fortunes of General French in his operations for the relief of Kimberley, which were then in progress, furnished a fruitful subject in addition to the usual discussion of drill and tactics. In the evening I heard of General Clements' retreat from Rensburg on Arundel, and my feelings with regard to having missed being present at so interesting an operation, can scarcely be expressed. That General Clements should have succeeded in withdrawing his widely dispersed detachments from a front of some twenty-three miles with comparatively slight loss and no really serious misadventure, except that which befell two companies of the Wiltshire Regiment, is really remarkable. Great credit is certainly due to all concerned; the difficulties surmounted were immense.

"*February* 15.—This morning I rode out to see the

remount depôt, which is about two miles from camp, on the southern bank of the Orange River. Prince Francis of Teck and Captain Sykes are the officers in charge, the former apparently presiding over the outdoor work, whilst the latter attends to the correspondence, etc. I was fortunate enough to arrive just as a batch of horses had been brought up for purchase. This was a useful experience, in that it gave me an idea of the general quality of the horses submitted for selection. Sometimes one feels amazed at some wretched brute having been accepted into the Service, but many of the worst of them are Islington prize winners in comparison with some of the rejected. The system at the Orange River Remount Depôt appears to be excellent. There are a number of wire-fenced kraals, each intended to accommodate different classes of horses. The first enclosure contains the horses selected for officers, the next is for cavalry, the next for artillery etc., with the 'sick lines' bringing up the rear. Mangers have been provided by the Royal Engineers, and run in long lines down the various kraals. This, apart from the convenience and the saving of waste, is a very necessary precaution against sand-colic, which would otherwise be prevalent; the sand being very deep and loose throughout the camp.

"*February* 16.—To-day we received early the very welcome news of the occupation of Kimberley by General French, and, later on, the even more important intelligence regarding the retreat of the Boer army

from Modder River. This will most certainly be followed by the submission of the Orange Free State within the course of a few days. That the Boers may fight a battle to cover Bloemfontein is not improbable, but it seems more likely that no serious resistance will be offered. Upon the other hand small commandos have already begun to waylay our convoys, and until all these marauders have been dispersed, a good deal of trouble may be given. A huge convoy appears to have been captured yesterday on the Riet River almost under the noses of the army.

"On Saturday, 17th, reports of Cronje being surrounded —some said already a prisoner—began to arrive, and I became perfectly wild to get on to join the army. At last, on Sunday morning, came a wire from De Aar that Arendse, with the horses and the 'weagon,' was actually on the road, and might be expected to reach Orange River by train that evening. My preparations were soon made, and, to my infinite delight, not only did Arendse arrive, but I managed to obtain permission to travel, with all my belongings, in a troop-train conveying a battery of artillery to Modder River the same night. This was indeed a stroke of luck, for which I have good reason to thank the Railway Staff Officer, who so kindly fell in with my wishes."

CHAPTER XIV.

PAARDEBERG.

SHORTLY before daylight on Monday, February 19th, we reached Modder River, where I joined Mr. Amery, chief correspondent of the *Times*, and Mr. Filson Young, of the *Manchester Guardian*. This was a very pleasant surprise, as I had expected that Amery would have already started to the front, and that I should be obliged to content myself with the company of Arendse and Cornelius. During the morning I bought a useful bay pony from a refugee and named it "Cronje;" also I met Radcliffe of the Devons, who, with my other old friends of Amphlett's company of mounted infantry from Sterkstroom, had not yet followed Dewar's with the army. Little did we know then that poor Dewar, and that dear boy Percival, had been killed upon the previous day in the absurd attack on Cronje's position. Others, also, I met at every turn—Lieut.-Colonel Rochford-Boyd, R.E., and Lieut.-Colonel Sharpe of the same corps. Meeting the latter was a real godsend. I was just returning from the purchase of my new pony—very hot and thirsty. Sharpe gave me soda-and-milk, to my infinite satisfaction.

At last, all being ready, Young and I started for Jacobsdal, Amery—with a despatch rider whom he had just engaged—having started shortly before us, intending to push right on to Klip Drift, about nine miles beyond Jacobsdal, which is itself about twelve miles from Modder River Station. The road was heavy, and Kruger and Steyn a trifle stiff after some thirty-six hours in the train, so that we were obliged to go slowly, the journey to Jacobsdal taking the greater part of three hours. At last, however, we arrived, and at the hotel found Major-General Wavell and the staff of his brigade, as well as a number of other officers. There were no vacant rooms, nor indeed any, except the General's, that had not more than one occupant. The General very kindly offered to sacrifice his own privacy for my benefit; but I thought this rather too great an imposition upon his kindness, and therefore elected to bivouac in a corner of the coffee-room. Next morning, however, I was glad to take advantage of the chance of having a bath in the General's room after he had left it. Such an opportunity was too good to be missed. The air was full of rumours; and in the night a message from Lord Roberts was received to the effect that Jacobsdal might expect attack at any moment. This resulted in my being denied permission to proceed in the morning, and ordered to await a convoy which was to march at 5 p.m. It was what I observed in connection with this convoy that first opened my eyes to the cause of our awful expenditure of horseflesh. At about 4.30 p.m. the mounted escort formed up on the

road about half a mile beyond the town, from which the wagons were by this time commencing to issue. After a longish while it at last occurred to some one that the men might as well dismount—and they did so. No attempt was, however, made to scatter the horses so as to let them graze. Finally, about 5.45 p.m., the convoy was reported ready to move, and the patrols to cover front and flanks then galloped off to their places with the best imitation of "Long Valley" smartness that their jaded animals were capable of. The troops had been on the ground for an hour and a quarter, yet it had occurred to no one to send the patrols forward, *at a walk*, to gain their distances and intervals; after which each should have dismounted and let the horses graze freely. It is because we are bad horse-masters, as much as for any other reasons, that the Boers have proved themselves so much better able to keep the field than ourselves. Throughout the march of that convoy our cavalrymen sat wearily in their saddles. Had they been Boers or Colonials the men would have marched on foot, probably half the entire distance, leading their horses.

My object in proceeding to Klip Drift was to ascertain whether it was indeed true, as I had heard at Jacobsdal, that no rations for horses could be had at the front. Therefore I left everything behind, except what little I cared to carry on the saddle, including a nose-bag of corn for Jess herself. My intention was to return and make arrangements at Jacobsdal in the event of this evil rumour proving to be well-founded—as indeed was

the case. Young, who felt very seedy, remained at Jacobsdal. At 11.30 p.m. the convoy reached Klip Drift, and after a most welcome "tot" of whisky given me by Colonel Stevenson, the Principal Medical Officer, I was glad to curl up in my waterproof cape under a convenient bank, with my head in my saddle. In the morning I was handed a note from Amery, telling me that he had pushed on to Paardeberg, to which place Lord Roberts had meanwhile advanced his headquarters; and as I quickly ascertained that forage could not possibly be had, the cavalry being already on short rations, I lost no time in setting out on my return to Jacobsdal. General Pole-Carew gave me a welcome cup of cocoa, and, having swallowed also a bit of ration biscuit, I cantered off, reaching Jacobsdal in time for breakfast. There I was fortunate enough to find an old friend, who managed to provide me with a couple of sacks of oats; and Young, who was too ill to proceed, and was therefore returning to Modder, undertook to procure and forward a further supply to Jacobsdal. In addition to the oats I succeeded in looting a big bag of chaff, which Arendse managed to stow in the "weagon," and at 3 p.m. I started once more for the front. At Klip Drift, Kincaid-Smith of the 9th Lancers joined me, and together we persevered on to Klip Kraal, about seven miles further, when we halted for the night close to the Guards' camp. Having arrived late, I did not make an early start next morning, because, being so short of forage, it was essential to let the horses graze. However, at 10 a.m., we marched and reached Paardeberg,

about ten miles distant, in good time for lunch. Here I met Major Rimmington, whom I had last seen at Rensburg. He was tired and hungry, and gladly joined me in a fierce attack upon "bully-beef" and biscuit. Shortly afterwards Amery appeared, and his satisfaction at once more enjoying the possession of a little more kit than what he stood up in can readily be imagined, more especially as a tremendous thunderstorm commenced about 3 p.m., and the shelter of the "weagon" became very welcome.

From Amery I heard a good deal about the disastrous fight of the 18th, and the terrible losses so needlessly incurred. The point which struck me most was the evident fact that the disposition of the attacking force was such that, whilst incapable of doing much harm to the enemy, it needed only that the two brigades chiefly engaged should gain ground to their respective fronts, in order to ensure that they should fire heavily into each other over the heads of the Boers! Let it be granted that for some reason, which has never been satisfactorily explained, an attack was necessary—yet even this does not excuse its being badly organized and directed. The lives of the gallant Colonel Hannay, and very many others, seem to have been simply thrown away.

Next morning Amery and I held a council of war. The forage question was a very serious one indeed. The Army Service Corps could not possibly supply us, and without reasonable rations it was obvious that our horses could not work. Eventually we decided that I

should return to Modder next morning, and having purchased a Scotch cart and oxen, load it with oats and return with all speed to headquarters. The surrender of Cronje could only be a question of days, or, perhaps, even of hours. Therefore there was no time to spare, and we had need to get ready for a swift march on Bloemfontein. Accordingly I left Paardeberg at 10.50 a.m. Friday, February 23, and after a halt of nearly two hours at Jacobsdal reached Modder River at 5.30 p.m. Jess made nothing of this thirty-eight miles' trek, in spite of the hard work and scanty rations of the past three days. Colonel Rochford-Boyd gave me a dinner, and his staff officer, a most charming young sapper, gave me a shake-down in his room. Poor fellow! he died not long afterwards, I was grieved to hear. Next morning I bought a cart and four oxen, hired a Kaffir driver and a "voor-looper," and arranged with the A.S.C. (thanks to Colonel Skinner) for the purchase in advance of as many rations as the cart could well carry. Leaving "John" and "Concertina" to bring on the cart after me, I started at 6.5 p.m. and rode to Jacobsdal, which was reached at 7.10. Here I spent the night, awaiting the cart which, it turned out, had broken down *en route* owing to rotten "yokes" having been supplied for it. John, however, marched into Jacobsdal late next afternoon after having triumphantly overcome innumerable obstacles. To proceed further the same night was, however, useless, so I spent yet another evening in the pleasant company of General Wavell and those with

him. Sir Howard Vincent passed the night at Jacobsdal. I set him on his way next morning, but soon forsook him, as the pace of his mule-cart did not quite come up to that of poor Jess. Our cart had trekked from Jacobsdal soon after midnight, and I found it "out-spanned" near Klip Drift as I rode by on my way to Paardeberg, where I arrived soon after lunch. This was the eve of Majuba Day, and rumour had it that something important would happen during the course of the next few hours. For once in a way rumour proved to be a true prophet. We turned into our blankets pretty certain that a crisis would come before daylight—and so it did. At 2.45 a.m. tremendous firing broke out, continuing fiercely for about half an hour, and at intervals afterwards until about 5 a.m. At about 6 a.m. came the glorious news that Cronje had asked for terms. At 7.45 a.m. the Boer general rode into camp, and all was over. Half an hour later our despatch rider was galloping hard for Modder with Landon's cable to the *Times*. I should have explained that my position at this time was that of assistant to Mr. Percival Landon, who, having hitherto been on the Modder with Lord Methuen, had naturally transferred himself to Lord Roberts' headquarters when the latter arrived.

After breakfast I mounted Jess, and, crossing the river by the Paardeberg Drift—in which I narrowly escaped a ducking—rode, by Landon's desire, to investigate what had happened upon the northern bank where the final scenes had been enacted. Briefly this is what

occurred. At 2 a.m. the Canadians, supported by the Gordons to their left and left rear, and with the Shropshire Light Infantry extended some considerable distance to their left front—at an angle of perhaps 120 degrees with their line—advanced from their trenches towards those of the Boers at the western extremity of the position. Having arrived within about 80 yards the skirmishers lay down, whilst in rear of them, about forty yards back, the Royal Engineers commenced to dig an advanced trench. Some considerable time before the trench had been completed the Boers opened a heavy fire, which grew more and more intense every moment. Colonel Kincaid and Captain Boileau, with their gallant sappers, persevered, however, and completed the trench—with considerable loss, it is true, but yet with far less than might reasonably have been expected. The skill and devotion displayed by the officers and men of the Royal Engineers was the subject of universal praise, and, as regards the trench that they dug, Major-General Smith-Dorrien said to me, "If it had been planned, traced, and dug by daylight, without any enemy firing on the party, they could not have done it better." Nor, in my opinion, do these words, literally, involve more than an extremely slight exaggeration.

When the trench was ready the Canadians in front rushed back and occupied it, whilst others, coming from the river-bed, as well as some Gordon Highlanders, who, unable any longer to resist the temptation to take a hand, came up from the rear. The fact that the leading

part in the final drama of Majuba Day was taken by a Colonial corps is, next to the actual surrender which ensued, the most satisfactory feature of the entire operation. Congratulations were warmly showered upon the gallant Canadians, and received by them with most commendable modesty. I had a long talk with Colonel Otter, who ascribed the chief honours of the enterprise to Captains Macdonell and Stairs, and gave me many interesting particulars about his regiment. It was a fine feat of arms, and deserves to be remembered through all time.

At first I could not understand how men could have lived under such a fire as the Boers brought to bear in their direction, but suddenly the explanation dawned upon me. Between the Boer lines and the Canadian skirmishers was a thin bouquet of low bush. In the gloom this bush deceived the enemy and caused him to fire high. We often read of a "hail of bullets," and such indeed swept past the Canadians and Sappers, but fortunately over their heads for the most part.

The Canadians numbered 500 strong, of whom 10 officers and 110 men belonged to the permanent force, the remainder being militiamen. The physique of the battalion was very fine indeed.

The Shropshires, who supported the attack of the Canadians by volleys against the northern face of the enemy's position and the flank of the western trenches, against which the Canadian advance was directed, were very fortunate in sustaining only one casualty—Lieutenant Atchison being wounded. This immunity

from serious loss was due to the excellent dispositions of the commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel Spens, whose skill in the common-sense handling of troops has been so consistently remarkable throughout the campaign. The same quick eye and ready grasp of situations that had already brought Colonel Spens into the first rank as a racquet player, has since served him equally well when leading his battalion in action. In short, he has always succeeded in understanding what was required of him, and in getting his battalion into the right place so as to execute his orders in the most effectual fashion, namely, with the maximum loss to the enemy and the minimum to his own men.

Major-General Smith-Dorrien I found, as usual, filled with joy over the fine performances of his brigade and yet apparently unconscious of having any claim to a personal share in the credit that had been won. Actually, there is no doubt whatever that the excellent results achieved were due as much to the General himself as to the gallantry of the troops under his command.

The condition of the Boer laager and entrenchments was indescribably horrible, and the stench truly awful. Rotting carcases and filth of every kind were everywhere in profusion. How the unfortunate men managed to endure their condition for so many days it is impossible to imagine. The hope of relief no doubt buoyed up their spirits, but the trial must have been a desperate one. A more gallant defence against overwhelming numbers has seldom been made, and probably never under such trying circumstances. It has often been

remarked that the Boer prisoners, as a rule, did not seem to be depressed by their misfortunes. This can, however, be easily explained. The men knew that they had done their duty manfully, and that though defeated they were not disgraced. Therefore, it is by no means to be wondered at that when their trials ended, human nature asserted itself in a certain satisfaction at having survived so terrible an ordeal.

The position occupied was theoretically untenable, and many a scientific general would have speedily renounced all hope of defending it for four and twenty hours. However, by dint of digging a series of deep, narrow trenches on both sides of the river, with head cover at intervals along the line, and scooping out cave-dwellings under the banks, a very formidable system of defence had been formed by dint of hard work and the exercise of common sense. The strength of the position lay in the fact that, whilst the defenders could shoot their assailants from whatever direction the latter might approach, the former were themselves well protected against the hostile fire. In short, the essential principles of a purely passive defence had been fully observed. The offensive-defensive does not suit the Boer character at any time, and in the present case it was impracticable, owing to the immense numerical superiority of the attackers. But for the sanitary difficulties of the situation, the Boers might have held their post as long as provisions and ammunition lasted. The attack delivered by the Canadians, indeed, succeeded in precipitating the surrender; but

a strong counter-attack would probably have proved successful and by no means costly if not pursued too far.

At 6 p.m. the same evening I was once more on the road, combining two objects in a single journey. Amery had to return to Cape Town, and his kit, small as it was, amounted to more than could be carried on horseback. Secondly, there was Landon's long telegram to be conveyed to the telegraph-office. Accordingly, Kruger and Steyn were harnessed to Landon's Cape cart, and I drove Amery to Modder River Station, with the telegram in my pocket. The roads were in a fearful state owing to the heavy rain, and the night was pitch dark. Consequently, we failed to accomplish the journey, and were glad to halt at Jacobsdal at 1.30 a.m. We pulled the landlord of the hotel out of bed, and, after seeing to the horses—for whom, thanks to Young, lots of forage had arrived at Jacobsdal—we had some food, and then slept in a sort of scullery, the coffee-room being already full to overflowing. At 6 a.m. we got away, after a scanty breakfast, and reached Modder shortly after 8.30, in plenty of time for Amery to catch his train. Here we found Young already much better — thanks to the care of Mr. Cheatle, one of the cleverest of the consulting-surgeons, and who was for the time stationed at Modder River. During the day I procured some stores for our party, and, having loaded up these in the cart, I set out upon the return journey, reaching Jacobsdal in time for dinner. Here I had a bedroom all to myself, and

a comfortable bed. The luxury of this, after so much knocking about, can readily be imagined. Next morning, March 1st, I rejoined headquarters, which had meanwhile shifted camp from the pestilential neighbourhood of Paardeberg to Osfontein, about five miles further east. On the way I bought a pony from a Kaffir for thirty shillings, and, strange as it may appear, found shortly after that it was not worth nearly so much money!

Just as we had arranged our bivouac, and the cookhouse fire had begun to give promise of dinner before sundown, the Guartermaster-Qeneral came round in furious majesty, and ordered us to move elsewhere. This, most reluctantly, we did. Our notion was that orders, in the first instance, telling us where to go, would have saved some little annoyance to both parties. However, such things are the fortune of war; and, after all, there is a kind of inexplicable pleasure in possessing a really substantial "grievance."

On Friday morning I rode the Kaffir pony to Kitchener's Hill, from which a good view of the Boer positions about Poplar Grove is to be had. The enemy appeared to hold a line astride of the river, the right being on the Leeuw Kop upon the north bank, and the left, running south-east, terminated in a bunch of plum-pudding-shaped small kopjes, called by some the "Seven Sisters." Boers at work making entrenchments were plainly visible. In the evening, Young arrived from Modder looking fairly fit, and joined our party which was thus raised to four—including Landon,

myself, Young, and the despatch-rider, an American journalist named Unger.

At this time the bad weather interfered terribly with the prosecution of the campaign. Obviously the sooner Lord Roberts could attack the enemy in front of him, the less time would the latter have to strengthen his position and to receive needful reinforcements. But it would have been useless to make any serious move forward until the supply question had been solved and the army could follow up its success by a fairly continuous advance to Bloemfontein. Sunday, March 4th, was fearfully wet, and the roads, already cut into ruts a foot deep, became in places almost entirely impassable. Saturday, Monday, and Tuesday I amused myself riding about amongst our outposts. On Monday I crossed over by Koodoosrand Drift, and had a look at things on the north bank of the river, and on Tuesday, after having watched a skirmish between a party of Australians and a Boer patrol, I visited the Mounted Infantry camp, where I met Colonel Alderson as well as several of my old friends of the Sterkstroom days. Radcliffe had succeeded "The Squire" in the command of the Southern Company, the latter having taken over the battalion from Colonel Alderson who had been promoted to the command of a brigade. It was the first time I had seen any of them since the fatal 18th of February, and sadly one missed poor John Dewar and little Percival. The others were all as nice as ever; but they had not forgotten their dead comrades —nor had I. On my way back to camp I rode some

distance with that smartest and keenest of cavalry soldiers, Lord Airlie, who was riding round the outposts. Few better men than he have died during this war.

In the evening the whole of the Cavalry Division, with Royal Horse Artillery and Mounted Infantry, moved from about Koodoosrand to Osfontein camp. This was sufficient to let us all know that the army would advance next morning against the enemy, and that the turning movement in connection with it was to be on the largest possible scale and obviously directed round the enemy's left—upon the latter point Lord Roberts had no alternative.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ENGAGEMENT AT POPLAR GROVE.

LORD ROBERTS' plan of battle was as follows: The Cavalry Division, with Royal Horse Artillery and some other mounted troops, had orders to move round the enemy's left by a night march and seize the line of low hills about two miles east of Poplar Grove. The 6th Division, with Martyr's Horse and a howitzer battery, to follow the cavalry.

The bulk of the army in its advance would press the enemy in front, whilst French, heading him off from his line of retreat eastwards, and Kelly-Kenny blocking him similarly to the south, would combine to secure the capture of the whole force. The Modder was practically impassable at Poplar Grove Drift, owing to the heavy floods; but in order to ensure against any chance of the Boers escaping over the river, the 9th Division, with three naval 12-pounders, and covered on the outer flank by Henry's Mounted Infantry, received orders to march on the northern bank; the Highland Brigade on the right, that is to say, next to the river, and Smith-Dorrien's Brigade on the left. The strength of the British Army amounted to 30,000 men, with 116

guns, whilst the enemy was estimated to have 14,000 men, with 40 guns. Actually, the Boer forces numbered perhaps one-third of the total credited to them.

Landon very naturally elected to accompany Lord Roberts' Headquarters, which were with Colonel Le Gallais, whose men led the advance of the main body, supported by the brigade of Guards. My own task was to cross the Koodoosrand Drift and attach myself to the fortunes of the 9th Division. Accordingly I made for Smith-Dorrien's brigade, after a short halt at the Divisional Headquarters in order to gain a general notion of where the troops were going and what they were going to do. So far as I could gather, there was no expectation of taking any very active part; the duty assigned to the division being solely to prevent the enemy from escaping northwards over the river. However, I felt pretty certain that if a chance of doing any good work offered itself Smith-Dorrien would grasp it without fail—and I was not disappointed. When I joined the brigade, the head of it furnished by the Shropshire Light Infantry was on a low rocky kopje, about a mile north of the river, whilst the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, echeloned slightly in rear of the Shropshires' right, prolonged the line towards the Highland Brigade in the bush along the bank of the river. The Gordon Highlanders were in support of the Shropshires, and the Canadians supported the Cornwalls. Among the rocks at the top of the kopje I found the General with his Staff, Colonel Spens, and sundry other officers.

In the far distance we could hear, away on the enemy's left, the sound of firing, but from where we were no signs of the army could be seen, since the kopjes upon the south bank of the river effectually hid Lord Roberts' lines of approach. To our left Henry's Mounted Infantry were skirmishing, and at the time unable to gain much ground. Boers could be distinguished moving about within their main position upon the south side of the river, and also a few upon the Leeuw Kop, about 3000 yards to our right front. At 9 a.m. Boer wagons began to move off eastwards, and it became evident that the enemy was about to retreat. In vain we strained our eyes and ears in the hope of finding that French had reached his positions beyond Poplar Grove.

At 9.20 the three naval 12-pounder guns came into action about 1200 yards to our right rear, and opened fire upon the enemy's convoy, and upon some bodies of horsemen that had appeared in the distance. The fire was apparently ineffectual, but the range, being probably 7000 yards, was too great for the results to be properly observed. However, as not a single wagon in the convoy was checked in its career, it is certain that this target at all events was never struck by a shell. About 10 a.m. a Boer 9-pounder Krupp, on the summit of the Leeuw Kop, commenced replying to the naval guns, and had much the best of it. Owing to the height of the position occupied by the enemy, about 1800 feet above the plain, it was apparently impossible for our men to train their guns at the requisite elevation, and at 10.5

the guns changed position forward and to the right. But it was no good. Still the little gun on the hill kept dropping its shells all amongst the battery—marvellous to relate, without effect—whilst the nearest approach to an effective reply struck the hill at least fifty yards below the target. So the contest went merrily on; the Boer convoy, by this time nearly two miles long, having by 11.10 made such progress, in spite of the fire directed upon it, that its tail had left Poplar Grove.

At 11.45 Smith-Dorrien received a report from Henry that the enemy in front of him on the Blauberg—about 3000 yards north of the Leeuw Kop—was giving way before his attack, and then in a moment the General decided that his time to move had come. There was no sign of French, and he saw that by pressing forward rapidly he might at least cut off the retreat of the gun on the Leeuw Kop, and not impossibly inflict some damage upon the tail of the Boer main body. The Shropshires were sent forward, Colonel Spens being ordered to incline slightly to his left towards the Blauberg, where the presence of Henry's Mounted Infantry in contact with the enemy would keep down the fire, and then, having passed through the opening, two companies were to swing round and scale the Leeuw Kop from its right rear, whilst the rest of the battalion, having gradually brought up its left shoulder, was to head for a single poplar tree on the river bank a short distance east of Poplar Grove farm.

Just at this moment came an order from Sir Henry

Colville requiring a reinforcement to the Highland Brigade, which, it was said, was engaged in a "heavy rear-guard action." Smith-Dorrien complied by detaching the Canadians in the required direction, and at the same time explained that he had decided upon a movement which would, he thought, assist the Highland Brigade more effectually than if he were to reinforce them more heavily. The Gordons and Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry followed in support of the Shropshires, and later on, when the conversion to the right had been completed, the Gordons came into first line on the right of the Shropshires, amongst whom bullets were flicking up the dust pretty frequently, but with only trifling effect. Meanwhile, the two companies of the Shropshires had successfully scaled the hill and captured the gun; the Boers not awaiting the onslaught but retiring in haste down the south-east slope, and thence away along the river bank. Had the General had even one company of mounted infantry at his disposal this party must almost certainly have been cut off. However, we at all events got the gun, and this in those days—and for long after—represented an unusual class of success. The operations above described take but a few words to relate, but took a great deal of time to accomplish.

It was nearly 4 p.m. when, the Shropshires having completed the eastern circuit of a great "pan" which had for a long time divided them from the Gordons on the west of it, the brigade was fairly on its way for Poplar Grove, and the Boers really in flight beyond

the left flank. The distance from Poplar Grove was then about three miles, and, as nothing more seemed likely to happen, I rode forward alone, and on reaching the drift found it quite impassable, unless at the expense of a ducking. This I did not care to incur, as I deemed it extremely probable that our transport would not be up that night, and, as I had not a blanket, I did not care to sleep, unnecessarily, with damp extremities. Accordingly I left Jess at General Colville's headquarters, which had already been established at a farm near the drift, and crossed over to the other side in an engineer punt. Landon, I soon heard, had gone back to Osfontein, and Young with him. It was too late now for me to reach camp before dark, so I determined to make the best of things. I recrossed the river, and arranged for the mare to remain where she was for the night; there was lots of "forage" at the farm, so for once she got a good feed of excellent stuff. For my part, I had some tea that General Colville kindly gave me, and then returned to the headquarter side of the river. At a ruined "store" close handy were the headquarters of the 7th Division, and to the bounty of that most hospitable man, General Tucker, I am indebted for an excellent dinner. The night I spent under a corner of the house, with my feet towards an "international fire," which I had assisted the foreign attachés to make for the benefit of us all. Some went inside the house, but there were too many traces of a recent surgical occupation, and I preferred the open air. Early in the morning Mr. Hands, of the

Daily Mail, drove up, and from him I obtained a good breakfast. Porridge and beefsteak—the latter the usual "trek-ox," but the former excellent. Then came Landon, Young, and the impedimenta, and very soon we were settled in a delightful camp in the orchard close to the farmhouse. The results of the Poplar Grove fight were disappointing. The enemy evacuated his positions with the loss of one gun. Our cavalry sustained some fifty or more casualties. The enemy was not captured or punished in any serious fashion, and Messrs. Kruger and Steyn got away amongst the rest. The failure was due in the first place to some mistake, by which the Cavalry Division was late in marching off, and, secondly, to its having subsequently permitted itself to be drawn, *en bloc*, into a skirmish with the Boer outposts to the south, instead of pushing on to the position that it had been ordered to seize. Had General French reached his intended destination, the Boer army must have shared the fate of Cronje; and with the capture of Kruger and Steyn the war would probably have been brought to a close almost immediately. For the Boer army, as an army, no avenue of escape lay open except that which the non-arrival of General French permitted it to utilize.

Fully carried out, Lord Roberts' scheme could scarcely have failed in achieving complete success. Actually it miscarried.

The morning after the fight I rode out to have a look at the Boer camp under the south-east slope of the Leeuw Kop, and there found an excellent set of iron

tent-pegs, which I appropriated. The Royal Engineers were busy clearing a road by which to bring down the captured gun. This made me wonder why we should require a road to bring down a gun which the enemy had taken up without any similar assistance? But then, I reflected, we are not Boers. On the way back, I had lunch with the Shropshires, in accordance with a promise given the previous day. The regiment had received supplies from Kimberley, and for the time revelled in luxury. I had something very good that came out of a tin box, and washed it down with whisky and water. I have an idea that some officers were drinking claret, but this may be my imagination. At all events, I had a very excellent lunch, in spite of which I found myself full of pains and aches in the evening. My troubles may have resulted from sleeping on the ground without a blanket on the previous night, or perhaps from the after-effects of a bad fall I had on Tuesday, when Jess put her foot in a hole and rolled over me. However, I was fairly right again by Friday morning, and quite fit when the army continued its advance on Saturday morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ACTION OF ABRAHAM'S KRAAL—DREIFONTEIN AND THE OCCUPATION OF BLOEMFONTEIN.

THE army marched from Poplar Grove on Saturday, March 10th, in three columns. The 6th Division clinging to the south bank of the Modder River, advanced on Abraham's Kraal, whilst the 7th made a detour by the south-east through Petrusburg, and the main body followed the direct road to Bloemfontein *viâ* Dreifontein. The cavalry for the most part preceded the 6th Division on Abraham's Kraal. No one seemed to have any idea that a fight was to be expected, and, indeed, when, at 3.45, and about two miles from Dreifontein, we heard the sound of firing to our left front, we imagined that an encounter battle had only just begun, although actually the 6th Division, forming the left column, had been already engaged for several hours, and Kelly-Kenny was now successfully driving in the enemy's right, which was recoiling upon his centre in front of our main body. As I rode forward, I found a group of headquarter staff-officers on a hill on the north side of the road close to Dreifontein Farm, and from them learned that only I myself and

those who had no knowledge of the situation had been surprised at hearing the noise of battle. Armed with a somewhat sketchy idea of what was going on, I continued onwards to a kopje about two miles north-east of Dreifontein, under shelter of which was the "dressing station" to which a good many wounded had already been conveyed. On this kopje Kelly-Kenny and his staff soon after arrived, whilst to the left front his infantry, continuing their advance, were gradually gaining ground under considerable difficulties. To the right front a battery of field artillery was carrying on, in the open, after our usual fashion, a rather unequal contest with the concealed guns of the enemy. Just then the Boers began to shell the kopje, and the dressing-station was hastily moved a few hundred yards further to the rear. I had left Jess to graze under the shelter of a steep part of the northern spur, just by the dressing-station, and from behind a friendly boulder on the summit of the kopje I watched the proceedings on our front and flanks. At first things seemed a bit uncertain, and I could not quite make out what our people were driving at. By degrees, however, I realized that a difficulty had arisen, because after Kelly-Kenny had advanced from the Abraham's Kraal position, driving the enemy eastwards and south, the latter had subsequently reoccupied with artillery a position from which they had previously been ejected. Thus, whilst pressing against the enemy towards Dreifontein, the division was assailed from its left rear by a gun near a red farmhouse on a hill about

2500 yards to the north-east. In spite of a severe fire right in its teeth, and shells plumping into its ranks from the rear, a battalion of infantry was advancing most gallantly up a hill immediately to my front, and I admired their conduct so much that, seeing some men, about thirty yards below me, lying amongst the rocks, I quitted my position in order to find out whether they knew which regiment it was that had attracted my notice. This was a well-timed move. Scarcely had I reached the spot, and asked my question, when a shell from the gun by the red farm burst fair and true in front of the rock under which I had been sitting. Had I been still there, the shrapnel would have hit me first and the rock afterwards. When I again mounted to the top, after discovering that the gallant battalion was none other than that historic corps, the Buffs, I took good care to find a place where I had a rock on either side of me. Such precautions proved, however, to have been needless, since no other shell struck within reasonable distance of my new hiding-place. It was now 5.25 p.m. Ten minutes later, the Buffs had gained the hill, and just then the battery already mentioned changed position towards the north-west, and engaged the enemy's gun by the red farm. Meanwhile, Lord Roberts' main body had begun to make its presence felt against the enemy in front of Dreifontein, and the near approach of sunset gave evidence that a decisive issue could scarcely be expected the same evening. At 6.5 Colonel Benson gave orders for the disposition of

the 6th Division outposts, and I then left hurriedly in order to find our camp before it became too dark. On arrival at the headquarter camp at Dreifontein, I met Young on foot, his little mare having been wounded, and received a message that our "outfit," as the Americans would call it, had broken down, and was outspanned a mile or more to the rear. It was by this time quite dark, but the spot having been approximately indicated, I had no difficulty in finding the "weagon," nor had Young, who turned up soon afterwards. Kruger was the cause of the mischief, having had a rather bad attack of gripes, from which he was still suffering. I gave him half a bottle of chlorodyne in a hot drink, and then had dinner. The night passed quietly, and we were by no means surprised to find in the morning that the enemy had abandoned his remaining positions. Our losses had been heavy, about 400 killed and wounded, but those of the enemy had, it afterwards proved, been at least as numerous. Our men buried 102 dead Boers, and a few days later I discovered, accidentally, from Boer sources, that we had not buried all that had been killed.

We continued our march without delay, after burying the dead, to Doornboom, about two miles east of Asvögel Kop, a distance of about fifteen miles. Kruger still inclined to gripes, but managing to get along somehow. We helped him by fixing a tow-rope to the tail of the ox-cart carrying the forage, and by this means accomplished the journey without serious

trouble. During the halt *en route*, whilst our natives were in an adjoining field, cutting some mealies to carry along with us, and we were having a rather late lunch, some one stole one of Landon's horses. However, I succeeded in annexing a stray animal of doubtful value, which, indeed, managed to complete the journey, and to eat a hearty feed of mealie-stalks and oats after its arrival, but next morning showed evident signs of approaching dissolution. To meet this difficulty, I hunted round, and soon discovered a very useful-looking bay mare with an awful sore back, and evidently abandoned by some mounted corps, or by the Boers, upon that account. The place was well behind the pad, so there was no cruelty to animals involved by working the mare in harness. Accordingly, Miss "Castaway" was speedily hooked in, and we proceeded on our way rejoicing.

In the afternoon, we reached Venter's Vlei, where we found a good deal of forage, and Jess revelled in unaccustomed plenty. I was an early arrival, and, after a most exciting chase, secured a nice fat porker. The pig-hunt culminated in the animal being brought to bay, and cleverly taken in the room appropriated as the Royal Engineer telegraph-office. Broadwood and Martyr were sent on with a detachment of Royal Engineers to destroy the railway at Leeuwberg, whilst French, with Porter's Brigade and Alderson's Mounted Infantry, advanced directly towards Bloemfontein. The latter was later on reported to have seized a strong position on some kopjes beyond Brand Dam, within

about five miles of the town. No serious opposition was encountered.

Next morning, Monday, March 13th, the army advanced at 6 a.m., the transport making good progress over fairly good roads. About 10 a.m., Young and I, as we rode along, saw a Union Jack flying over a nice-looking farm, and visions of bread, eggs, and milk rose at once before our hungry eyes. Nor were we disappointed. The farm belonged to a British settler named Hetherington, who had, it turned out, been born on the estate of the late Colonel C. Helyar, of Poundisford, near Taunton, and the farm had been named "Poundisford," after the birthplace of its owner. Mr. Hetherington was most hospitable, but when he found that I knew the Helyars, and had often been at Poundisford, he became, if possible, even more kind and attentive. We had the best breakfast I ever ate in my life, including home-made brown bread, with butter that could not have been beaten in the "West Country" itself. I should have liked to have sat still after breakfast with a quiet pipe; but it was evident that our advanced troops were on the move, and that the day's march would extend to Bloemfontein itself—and, indeed, we had not much time to spare. Lord Roberts and the staff, riding at the head of the cavalry, were already within a couple of miles of Bloemfontein, when Jess, after a long gallop, landed me into my place in the procession. The entry into Bloemfontein was greeted by as much cheering as the small British population could muster, and the Union Jack was hoisted

with some ceremony at the Presidency, where Lord Roberts established his headquarters. The hoisting of the flag recalled to me the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877, when I took part in the parade of the troops at Pretoria on the Queen's Birthday, and I looked forward with great hopes of seeing the flag hoisted there once more within a few weeks. This expectation was, however, doomed to be disappointed.

The flag ceremony being over, we adjourned to the Bloemfontein Hotel, and, after the luxury of a hot tub, soon applied ourselves to an indifferent dinner, with an excellent bottle of champagne, ordered in honour of an eventful day.

On Wednesday morning the 6th Division marched through the town. It was a fine sight. The physique of the men and their gallant bearing as they tramped proudly through the enemy's capital made a great impression upon all who were present. In the afternoon, as some of us sat talking under the verandah of the hotel, an elderly civilian walked up, and, leaning on the rail, gazed intently at us for a few moments, when he ejaculated, "By Crumbs—my name is James Shiels—you can all go to h—ll! Now, which of you is going to fight me?" The challenger then proceeded to take off his coat and assumed a posture of armed vigilance. That he was pretty drunk need hardly be said. However, after a great deal of "By Crumbs!" and "You can all go to h—ll!" the nature of the man's grievance came to light. With a final commission of all our souls to the lowest depths of a much-adjectived Hades,

he shouted that we had "given away Wauchope, the best man that ever stepped." Mr. Shiels, it transpired, hailed from the Heart of Midlothian, and the lamented death of the gallant Wauchope was regarded by him as personal matter directly affecting himself.

On Thursday morning I received a wire from Amery inquiring how soon I could start for Kimberley, in order to join the "Mafeking Relief Column." I replied that I hoped to be able to march the same evening, and this, after a great deal of trouble, I succeeded in doing. There was a bright moon, and I determined to make a night march. Young, to my great satisfaction, decided to go with me, and amongst the many things to be attended to was the purchase of a horse to replace the little mare wounded at Dreifontein, and not yet fit for work. The result was that Young became possessed of "Bobs." We marched at 7.10 p.m., and at 9.30 p.m. reached Bainsvlei, about ten miles west of Bloemfontein, on the direct road to Abraham's Kraal and Kimberley. Next morning we marched thirteen miles to Leeuwvlei, where we halted until 7 p.m., in order that the horses might graze, and then proceeded onward, about fourteen miles to Abraham's Kraal. At Leeuwvlei we found a store kept by a very quaint old Irishman named "Billy." Probably he had at some period of his existence had a surname, but we could get no further than "Billy." This man said that he had been doing a roaring trade. His store had been commandeered to the amount of £50, but by very judiciously raising his prices he had got back the £50, and more

besides. From Billy I bought a pair of "veldt scoons," plainly marked on the soles 10*s.*, but for which he charged me 10*s.* 6*d.*, no doubt in order to cover the value of a cup of coffee for which he had declined to accept payment. We outspanned at a deserted farm about two miles beyond Billy's, and here we secured a couple of ducks, for which we paid by watering the flowers, including some pots indoors. Young also pumped up much water for a sow and her pigs—the surviving ducks naturally participating also in the benefits conferred. Late in the evening we caught up a spring ox-wagon, near Abraham's Kraal, in which the family of Mr. Otrell, to whom the place belongs, were returning from Bloemfontein to their home. The girls told us many interesting particulars about the fight on the previous Saturday, immediately after which they had been obliged to take flight for fear of the Boers, who had become very threatening. Mr. and Mrs. Otrell had remained at the farm, but had sent the children away. Amongst other things, the children told us how one of them, when our cavalry scouts were approaching the farm, noticed some Boers hiding under the garden wall, evidently waiting to shoot them. The plucky child ran round by the back and succeeded in warning the men before they arrived within the area commanded by the Boer riflemen. She got back to the house without being seen; but the Boers suspected that warning had been given by some one, and talked of burning the house. Finally, however, they decided to adopt a different course, and placed a gun alongside it, saying

that when the Rooineks came up they would be sure to shell the house because of the gun opening upon them from its vicinity. Then Mr. Otrell inspanned his wagon, and sent the children away. The Boer plan miscarried, nevertheless, owing to the line of advance adopted by the British, and the party holding Abraham's Kraal retreated rapidly in deadly fear of being cut off. The farm thus escaped any injury. The Otrell family is Anglo-German. One son, who was commandeered by the Boers, had been killed at Colenso, and another who had also been on commando, but in the Free State, had just returned home. An elder daughter told me that her husband was with a commando in Natal, and that she had heard nothing of him for nearly three months. The poor soul was naturally in a state of great anxiety.

As we had arrived at Abraham's Kraal late at night, after 11 p.m., we did not make an early start on Saturday morning, and were content to get away at 9 a.m. Just as we were about to move off, a party of Boers rode up from the other side of the drift, and, I confess, I thought that we were about to find reason for directing our steps to Pretoria instead of Kimberley. My alarm, however, proved to have been groundless. The Boers were quite friendly, shook hands all round, and explained that they had merely come to bury dead whose bodies had been found on the adjacent kopjes subsequently to the fight. They were, moreover, careful to explain that the British troops had not been in any way remiss in their search for and burying the Boer

dead, but had simply failed to find them. The party consisted of over a dozen men, and it may therefore be surmised that the number of bodies to be interred must have amounted to half that number or more. The losses of the Boers at the Abraham's Kraal-Dreifontein fight must consequently have exceeded those of the British, for it may reasonably be conjectured that there were, at least, three wounded for every man killed. Upon this basis 102 + 6 = 108 killed must have 324 wounded added to it in order to get an estimate of the total loss—say 432 casualties in all.

Having bade good-bye to our Boer friends, we set out once more, and halted for lunch at a deserted farm about six miles east of Poplar Grove and close to the Modder River, in which we had a bathe. We had intended to cross the river by the Abraham's Kraal drift; but Mr. Otrell warned us that we might meet hostile Boers on that line, so we had decided to keep to the south bank and cross at Koodoosrand. After lunch we went on, and, as we neared Poplar Grove, the sky looked so threatening that we made up our minds to cross by that difficult drift rather than take the chance of a flood preventing us from doing so at Koodoosrand. This enterprise involved some very hard work. The further bank was very steep, and although Kruger and Steyn could certainly have dragged up the wagon without any great difficulty a fortnight before, they proved wholly unable to do so in the emaciated condition to which hard work and short rations had now reduced them. To cut a long story short, we had to off-load

the "weagon" and let the horses drag it up empty. After this we laboriously carried up the contents on our backs, and were not settled down in camp at Sir Henry Colville's late headquarters until 8.45 p.m. The horses were done up, and so were we, so the idea of making a further trek to Koodoosrand that night was necessarily abandoned. In the morning we caught a stray horse, and rigged up harness, with which we put him in "unicorn," ridden postillion by Young's servant, who was a nice light weight. The animal went rather tender in front, having apparently been slightly wounded in the fetlock. He carried on all right until just before we reached our halting-place at Darfontein, about seventeen miles distant, and about eight miles on the Kimberley side of Koodoosrand, where we halted during the heat of the day. The house at Koodoosrand, where General French had had his headquarters, had been gutted since we left it, the whole of the really dainty furniture having been ruthlessly destroyed. Whether this was the work of Kaffirs, or whether the owner was a pro-Britisher and his house had therefore been destroyed by Boers, I cannot say; at all events, neither here nor elsewhere along the route could the widespread damage have been caused by our troops, since none had revisited the ground since the advance of the army, when everything, indoors at all events, was left uninjured. Fences required for firewood had very naturally been pulled down in many places, and against this the most rabid sentimentalist could scarcely raise any serious objection.

From Darfontein we trekked next morning, Monday, 19th, to Kimberley, a distance of about eighteen miles. This journey was a very tedious one. Kruger was a hopeless wreck, but a strong artillery horse that we were fortunate enough to secure furnished an excellent means of overcoming the difficulty, as well as providing an excuse for Kruger's admission to the sick-lines at the Remount Depôt at Kimberley. I consented to forego the "salvage" due to me upon account of the Government horse brought in, upon condition that Kruger should be admitted to the sick-lines. This arrangement suited both parties to the transaction. The horse that we had caught was no doubt one of those that had fallen out during General French's relief operations, and had had time to achieve a fair recovery on the excellent grass between Koodoosrand and Darfontein.

It was a great disappointment to find, after the haste that we had made to leave Bloemfontein, that the "Mafeking Relief Column" had not as yet assumed any tangible shape. However, as my horses all needed rest, there was some consolation, and meanwhile a few days' good feeding at the hospitable Kimberley Club did not seem likely to do otherwise than prove beneficial to ourselves, after a fairly long spell of roughing it.

I took a trip down to De Aar in order to see my son, who had just arrived from England with his militia regiment, and also bought a big grey horse—Kruger's condition being for the time hopeless. I named the new animal "Cronje," after the bay pony which I had

transferred to Landon, and was well satisfied with him. Meanwhile we awaited events, and continued to do so until March 3, when we marched with Lord Methuen's Column to the Boshof district, there being no apparent prospect of the Mafeking Relief Column being ready to start for some considerable time.

CHAPTER XVII.

LORD METHUEN'S OPERATIONS ABOUT BOSHOF.

At 8 a.m. on the morning of April 3, Young and I started for Boshof, where the force under Lord Methuen had been ordered to rendezvous during that and the following day. On the road we passed several traction-engines, all of which were in difficulties, although the loads in all cases were absurdly light. The soil was generally sandy, but with a mixture of clay. There had recently been rain, and the result was that in the wet places the driving-wheels became loaded with hard mud, which effectually prevented the cross-ribs from having any grip to speak of anywhere, and none whatever in places where the road was deep with sand. We were much amused to see how when one of the engines had repeatedly failed to draw its wagons, those in charge got out their winding-gear, and, when all was ready, set the engine to work. The result was scarcely what they had expected. Instead of the wagons coming up to the engine, the latter wound itself rapidly back to the wagons! Eventually, by taking the wagons one at a time, the difficulties were surmounted; but, all things considered, I came to the conclusion that a good team

of oxen could give points to a traction-engine on soft or loose ground.

We had intended to go right through to Boshof, a distance of about thirty miles; but, as the roads were heavy, we decided upon resting for the night at Frankfort, rather more than halfway, and on the following morning trekked on to Boshof, where Lord Methuen and the staff of the Division also arrived during the afternoon of the same day.

From all accounts, the country about Boshof seemed to be pretty full of small commandos of marauders, whose object was to terrorize any of the inhabitants who might otherwise have felt inclined to make their submissions, and, of course, to seize any favourable opportunities to attack British detachments or convoys. Previously to Lord Methuen's arrival, the garrison of Boshof had been composed of militia, and it subsequently transpired, from documents found on the prisoners, that Colonel de Villebois Mareuil, whose commando was cut off on April 5 with such signal success, had intended to attempt the capture of that town by surprise. Instead of this, the gallant Frenchman was defeated and slain. The following is my narrative of this little action, as originally related in a letter to the *Times*, written on April 9:—

"About 10.30 a.m. a Yeomanry patrol reported the presence of the enemy on a kopje about nine miles east by south of Boshof; and at 11.15 the Yeomanry under Lord Chesham, with the Kimberley Mounted Corps under Lieut.-Colonel Peakman, and the 4th Field

Battery, started in pursuit. There was, however, but little expectation of catching the Boers, who might certainly have escaped had their commander been more wary and expeditious. The 'turn-out' of our men was quite a remarkable feat in itself. Their horses were all out at grass, and yet within thirty-five minutes after the receipt of their orders the troops were ready to start. Lord Methuen commanded in person, and shortly after 1 p.m. the enemy was found to be still in position on the kopje, from which he opened fire upon our scouts. Naturally the general was particularly anxious to ensure the capture or destruction of the entire party as an example to others, and in this case there was everything in his favour. It became almost immediately evident that the enemy had not more than perhaps 100 men, and measures for effectually cutting off his retreat could, therefore, be taken without any risk of danger from a counter-stroke. Lord Scarbrough, with Captain (Lieutenant - Colonel, Notts Yeomanry) Rolleston's squadron of Imperial Yeomanry, was sent round by the left, whilst Peakman's Kimberley Mounted Corps proceeded by the right, with the result that the enemy's retreat was effectually prevented. Meanwhile the main body of the Yeomanry took up positions in front, and when everything had been reported ready, the attack was commenced in earnest by the dismounted men.

"Of this attack, inconsiderable as the operation may appear in comparison with many others, it is scarcely

possible to speak in too complimentary terms. The Kimberley Mounted Corps had already a reputation, and might naturally have been expected to acquit themselves in a manner worthy of them. But the Yeomanry, upon the contrary, represented a corps that was practically untried, and some people, both out here and at home, had ventured to declare that they would prove to be of very little use, for a variety of reasons which it is now quite useless to recapitulate. The event, however, has proved these critics to have been false prophets. Not only did the Yeomanry show fine courage under fire, but they did their work throughout in exactly the fashion that should be followed in all operations similar to that in which they found themselves engaged. Full of dash and enterprise, yet taking advantage of every bit of cover, and utilizing the general features of the ground to the utmost, they prosecuted a perfectly methodical advance, gaining ground steadily, and never yielding an inch that had been gained. In a word, the Imperial Yeoman has shown that he possesses, to almost the same extent, that eye for ground which renders our colonial troops as well as our enemies the Boers so formidable in both attack and defence. Even to those who already believed in the Yeomanry, the fight brought a positive revelation, since the reality so entirely surpassed the most sanguine expectations. It must, of course, be admitted that a great share of the credit is due to Lord Chesham himself, whose personality represents a very

strong factor. He has succeeded in earning the confidence of his men, and day by day has proved the justice of the good opinions gained. The Yeomanry believed in Lord Chesham up to the last few days, but now they swear by him, and Lord Methuen appears to entertain very similar sentiments. This war will not have been waged in vain if it results, as many believe will be the case, in the resuscitation of the Yeomanry and Militia forces. The latter have not yet had their opportunity for distinction in action, but if they show the same spirit under fire that they have exhibited under the hardships of long, trying marches, fearful weather, and bivouacs deep in mud, we shall have good reason to be proud of them.

"After about three hours and a half of steady progress the Yeomanry fixed bayonets and charged up the kopje, when the enemy promptly hoisted the white flag and surrendered. Then, in the same dastardly fashion that has already been so frequently followed, some cowardly scoundrel fired on our men with fatal result. The man was instantly shot down, but this furnishes only a sorry retribution for the murder of a gallant British officer thus treacherously done to death. It seems high time that strong measures should be taken to put down such iniquitous proceedings by denying quarter in the next case when a shot is fired by the enemy after capitulation. Our loss was slight in comparison with the success achieved, being only twelve killed and wounded, including two officers. Of the enemy, upon the contrary, not one man escaped, fourteen being killed and

wounded, and the remainder, numbering fifty-four officers and men, taken prisoners. Another party of Boers, or possibly a detachment from that captured, was observed to retire hastily upon the approach of our troops; but Lord Methuen very wisely determined to devote his entire attention to such of the enemy as were actually within his grasp, and the runaways consequently made good their escape unmolested. Colonel de Villebois Mareuil, a French officer, who is said to have been a valued adviser of the Boer leaders, was amongst the killed, and it is noteworthy that those under his command appear to have been chiefly Frenchmen and Hollanders. Probably the men whom we saw running away represented the genuine Boer element in the commando. The Boer is less easily entrapped than the European, for the simple reason that he will never submit the security of his line of retreat to the chances of combat, unless the odds are ten to one in his favour.

"The little action which has just been described, although insignificant in itself, has nevertheless considerable importance—first, on account of the complete success attending its results directly and indirectly, and, secondly, because it was the occasion when the Imperial Yeomanry were for the first time under fire."

Rain commenced to fall almost immediately after the action was over, and every one was thoroughly drenched. Towards night the weather grew worse, tremendous thunderstorms succeeding each other in rapid succession. Young and I had pitched our camp near the commissariat supply park, on the low-lying ground in the

south-western part of the town, and when we returned from despatching our telegrams announcing the result of the fight we found the whole place flooded. A torrent was rushing past in the hollow close alongside, and on our actual camping-ground the water was quite six inches deep, and most of our possessions were afloat. These we rescued and piled upon the table and upon our two stools; then we turned in, regardless of everything, very thankful indeed that we had stretcher-bedsteads to keep us out of the water. By morning the flood had subsided and we shifted our camp to a more elevated position. That night I dined with the Imperial Yeomanry, and spent a very pleasant evening; but as we were to march next morning the party broke up at an early hour.

At daylight on April 7, Lord Methuen, with the bulk of his force, marched to Zwartkopjesfontein farm, about ten miles on the Hoopstad road north-east of Boshof. There was no opposition, the Boer commando which had been laagered in the neighbourhood of Beck's farm, about four miles distant, having discreetly sought a fresh camping-ground. It is very unlikely that the actual direction of our march could have been discovered by any of the numerous spies whom our system of making war encourages to throng the towns that we occupy; but the fact that a move somewhere was about to take place no doubt transpired, and this was enough. Probably other commandos also shifted, although with less reason.

On the following day, at 6.30 a.m., the column

marched to Mahemsfontein, which was reached in a couple of hours. It had been intended to proceed another six miles in the evening, but a telegram from Bloemfontein ordering our further advance to be postponed, resulted in a retrograde movement to Zwart Kopjes. This was, of course, regrettable for obvious reasons. To move troops impulsively forwards and then clutch them convulsively backwards is not a good way of making war. Had this order, however, been received three hours earlier Lord Methuen's force would simply have remained at Zwart Kopjes; but having marched therefrom, a retirement to that camping-ground was absolutely inevitable in the circumstances. The grass at Mahemsfontein could not have lasted two days, being at all times evidently poor, and at the actual moment exceptionally bad; whilst, even if the trees surrounding the homestead had been utilized, which would have been a pity, the supply of fuel would have proved equally inadequate for our wants. Thus, sorely against his will, Lord Methuen was compelled to retrace his steps to a more favourable camping-ground, where, moreover, the tactical advantages were very superior to those afforded by any position about Mahemsfontein. From what I could gather, it was actually intended to proceed to Hoopstad, but as to what would afterwards be done I was hopelessly in the dark. Possibly we might cross the Vaal River about Bloemhof, with a view to holding some strategic position blocking the road against the enemy retiring from Fourteen Streams; but, as it appeared that the 8th Division

had been diverted from Kimberley and Warrenton to some other destination, probably Bloemfontein, it was difficult to find any particular reason why the Boers at Fourteen Streams should retire at all until the resources of the entire district in which they were quartered had been consumed. This consideration led me to think that Lord Methuen would probably strike northwards towards Christiana, crossing the Vaal at Zoutspan's Drift or some other point within easy distance of Fourteen Streams. Against this theory was the obvious fact that we had taken the eastern road to Hoopstad, *viâ* Mahemsfontein, in place of the western, *viâ* Basberg, whence a good road runs directly to Christiana. But, upon the other hand, the road by which we were apparently about to proceed might have been selected with the special purpose of concealing the real intention. At all events, the actual plan of operations had been successfully kept dark so far as regards the troops themselves, and we could only hope that the enemy had been equally unable to comprehend it.

On the morning of the 9th the mounted troops under Lord Chesham made a reconnaissance in two bodies to the eastward—that under Lord Chesham in person taking the most northerly direction. I was informed that the latter had the better chance of meeting the enemy, and therefore elected to accompany it. My information proved to be correct, but nothing of any importance occurred. A small party of marauders was sighted, about four miles distant, when our scouts had

advanced about ten miles from camp, but the enemy made off so rapidly that it was quite impossible to come up with them. The whole force returned to camp about 2 p.m., after having effectually searched or cleared a wide area on our front and right flank. The Boer farms as a rule were tenanted by the women and children, who freely sold chickens, eggs, and milk to the troops at remunerative prices, but the men were almost invariably absent. Whether the latter were serving with the commandos or merely keeping out of sight it was not easy to say, but it is fairly clear that in either case it was fear of their friends rather than of their enemies that prevented the majority of them from resuming their ordinary avocations. Whatever Dr. Leyds or others may say, the average Free State Boer was by this time anxious for peace—unless the statements made by prisoners are to be discredited wholesale.

Shortly after our return to camp Major Streatfeild, the Press Censor, came round to tell me that two flying columns would start next morning at daybreak; the one, under General Douglas, making a circuit of the country to the south-east and east of camp, and the other, under Colonel Mahon, commanding Kimberley Mounted Corps, proceeding from Boshof south and east of that town. The object of these expeditions was to disperse any roving commandos that might be prowling about with the intention of giving trouble upon the lines of communication. That such commandos existed was certain, but whether we should have the good

fortune to repeat the success achieved against that under Villebois seemed somewhat doubtful. The other commandos, warned by the fate of Villebois and his men, would certainly be very shy and hard to get near. Be all this as it may, the attempt was well worth making, and good results were by no means impossible. We decided to throw in our lot with General Douglas. The chances of both columns seemed fairly even as to finding the enemy, but General Douglas, having the Northamptons in addition to Lord Chesham's Yeomanry, seemed to have better means of striking hard in case any considerable body of the enemy should be encountered.

Accordingly at daylight next morning, Wednesday, April 11, we set out with General Douglas' Flying Column. Our route lay at first to the south-east, after which, bending northwards and westwards, we returned to camp upon the third day, having described a pear-shaped circuit about forty miles in extent. Taken as a whole, the results of the expedition were disappointing. Many had looked forward with some confidence to a repetition of the good fortune which had attended the recent enterprise against the commando under Villebois, overlooking the fact that the circumstances were wholly dissimilar. Instead of a sudden dash by mounted troops, for a short distance, in order to take advantage of an opportunity that actually offered itself, we had now a column encumbered with infantry and baggage, setting forth to find opportunities as best it could. That luck might have been with us is of course possible,

but it is nevertheless only natural that the Boers easily succeeded in evading us. On Wednesday, it is true, the enemy gave us just a shadowy chance of intercepting him, but his dispositions were so judicious that our opportunity was more apparent than real.

Upon the first night the column bivouacked at a farm named Granaat Platz, about eleven miles E.S.E. from camp. The homestead is situated upon a ridge running nearly north and south, the highest part of which, rising southwards from the farm, forms a by no means contemptible position of about one mile in extent. To the north, the ridges are lower, and undulate gently until they finally terminate by an easy descent to the level of the plain at a distance of about two miles. At 9 a.m. General Douglas received a report from Lord Chesham that a Boer force estimated at 500 men was in position on the ridges about Granaat Platz, and a quarter of an hour later the general himself arrived at the front. It was perfectly obvious that the enemy's right was the proper flank to be operated against, and accordingly Lord Chesham was instantly directed to reinforce his left and work therefrom round the position. Peakman, with his detachment of the Kimberley Mounted Corps, watched the right, whilst the guns, with an escort of the Northamptons, followed the flanking movement. Meanwhile the convoy was parked under the protection of a strong escort of the Northamptons, whilst the remainder of the battalion was shortly afterwards directed to follow the artillery. On drawing near to the northern extremity of the ridges, the

yeomanry scouts came under a desultory fire, which, as the event proved, was directed against them by only a few men. But at the time there was no means of discovering the enemy's numbers unless by delivering a tentative attack. This, Lord Chesham very wisely decided not to do; but it is not improbable that, had he made the attempt, the enemy's weakness would at once have been disclosed, and in addition to our troops being relieved from the fatigue of a long march round, the enemy might possibly have been cut off. At all events, the fact remains that, by means of a "false flank," held just long enough and no longer, the Boers compelled us to make a wide turning movement, during the execution of which they found ample time to withdraw their entire force without loss. By the time that Lord Chesham had worked round to the rear and the Northamptons had crowned the summit of the northern ridges, not a Boer remained within range, and an hour later it was reported by our scouts that the enemy was once more in position upon a kopje about six miles east of Granaat Platz Farm, to which he had retreated directly from that place, retiring from both flanks in rear of the centre. By cleverly concealing their weakness and leading us to believe that they were strong, the Boers caused our cavalry to undertake a detour amounting to some eight miles, whilst the infantry engaged in the same operation marched six miles extra before reaching their bivouac upon the ground recently occupied by the enemy. We gained our point, in that we dislodged our opponents from our intended bivouac, but

the latter also gained theirs, in that they gave us a great deal of trouble and wasted our time. One man of the Northamptons, a volunteer, was slightly wounded, whilst the Boer loss was probably *nil*. Our artillery shelled the ridge to cover the infantry attack, but by that time it is pretty certain that not a Boer remained thereon. A shrapnel, however, decapitated a partridge which a man of the Northamptons picked up. Thus our guns were not employed entirely without effect!

Scarcely were the troops settled down in their bivouac than it began to rain in torrents, continuing throughout the night, so that lying down was utterly impossible. Personally I found shelter in an outhouse adjoining the farm which was itself occupied by a large Boer family, and consequently unavailable. I had many companions and was not particularly comfortable, but I have no hesitation in reaffirming that, upon such a night, "the worst billet is better than the best bivouac."

On Thursday morning the column marched *viâ* Elands-Fontein to Buitendam, the residence of Field-cornet Groenevaldt, a distance of about twelve miles. Here the Intelligence Department had information that a considerable quantity of ammunition was concealed; and true enough, after a brief search a small magazine was found sunk in a corner of the garden, in which there was not only ammunition—chiefly Mauser,—but also a case of dynamite. The result of this find was that in addition to some desultory sniping at our front, a constant fusillade was maintained in camp whilst the cartridges exploded singly or in volleys in the fires

lighted for the purpose of destroying them. There was no real fighting during the march or afterwards, but about fifty Boers could be seen from time to time hovering in the neighbourhood, and always taking good care to keep at a very respectful distance from our scouts. These, it appears, represented the rear-guard of the force encountered upon the previous day, the main body of which, about a hundred strong, was retiring with a small convoy of about half a dozen waggons. We had, however, no intention of pushing eastwards beyond Buitendam, so that the retreating enemy had no real cause for anxiety. To have maintained an active pursuit would have involved an expenditure of horseflesh that we could ill afford, and even if a successful result had attended the effort, the prize would scarcely have been worth the cost. That which had actually been done was sufficient for Lord Methuen's purpose. The Flying Column had pushed back the enemy to a distance of over twenty miles from the camp at Zwart Kopjes; and although this operation could not be expected to have more than temporary results, yet upon the next occasion the moral effect created might be relied upon to ensure that a smaller force would be able to repeat the process without difficulty.

On Good Friday General Douglas determined to march the whole distance back to Zwart Kopjes in place of taking two days, according to the original programme. There was nothing to be gained by delay, and the weather looked decidedly threatening, although

Friday itself was quite fine. The event proved the wisdom of this decision, since for many days afterwards we had showery weather, varied by spells of steady downpour of tropical thunderstorms. Had the column waited until Saturday, the latter part of the march would have been attended by great difficulties for the transport, the route passing over very deep ground traversed by no roads whatever. Starting at 5.30 a.m. from Buitendam, the column reached Zwart Kopjes about 5 p.m., having marched twenty-one miles, and rested during the heat of the day at Roberts' farm, about half-way, where the horses and oxen had excellent grazing. General Douglas' force consisted of 450 Imperial Yeomanry and Kimberley Mounted Corps, two guns 38th Battery R.F.A., the 2nd Northamptons, and sundry details. All did well, but the marching and general efficiency of the Northamptons calls for special remark. The marching-out strength of this fine battalion was 935 of all ranks; the work was very hard, and on Wednesday night not a single man could lie down for an instant owing to the rains. Yet no one fell out during or after any march, and 933 out of the 935 were present in their places marching into Zwart Kopjes. One man wounded and one man kicked by a mule accounted for the difference of two men. The cheerful and steady endurance of all the troops, regular and irregular, under very trying conditions, was beyond all praise.

One important fact, at all events, was brought into prominence by the march of General Douglas' column,

namely, that the practice of the British authorities in permitting Boers to nominally return to their farms, furnished an example of wholly misplaced "magnanimity." Women and children, with an occasional old man or boy, were to be found on the farms, whilst the able-bodied males performed intermittent service with some convenient commando. The occupants of the farms sold freely, at high prices, to the Government and to the troops, their property being, of course, carefully respected under the terms of the proclamation, although the real owners were still fighting against us or amusing themselves by cutting the telegraph wires. It should from the first have been enacted that whenever an able-bodied Boer absented himself from his farm without a pass granted for a specific purpose, his property should thereby become liable to confiscation in every case where the farm might be situated within the areas effectively occupied by our troops. The same difficulty applied with even greater force to the case of rebel colonists within our proper frontiers. Any rebel could with ease obtain a permit authorizing him to "return to his farm," subject to liability to "come up hereafter for judgment if called upon." But in no district where there were many rebels thus "returned to their farms" could a loyalist venture to reside, because his rebel neighbours took care to render this impossible. At the time I am now speaking of, it was more profitable to have been a rebel than to have been a loyalist, and it need scarcely be said that this should not have been the case.

Colonel Mahon's Flying Column, which should have

gone as far south as Klip Drift, returned to Zwart Kopjes on Saturday the 14th, having been compelled by stress of weather to abandon the completion of its march. Owing to the heavy rains, the country was rendered impassable for the transport. Mahon's force had an even less eventful career than that under Douglas.

On Saturday morning Young and I drove his ponies, generally known as the "uglies," into Boshof, where we wished to purchase stores that, as our stay at Zwart Kopjes seemed likely to be somewhat prolonged, we thought we might venture to acquire. Accordingly we invested in sundry tins of various meats, and a good stock of jam, marmalade, sardines, and such-like, with which we returned rejoicing in the evening. This and the succeeding four days passed without any excitement whatever excepting such as arose from the deluges of rain. The drainage works that we constructed about our camp were a triumph of engineering skill, and at all events perfectly effective for the object in view. So successful were these works, that it was positively a sorrow to us when they had so effectually drained the ground that it became no longer possible for us to arrange races between bits of stick down the various channels that carried away the water.

By Thursday, 19th, the weather had cleared up, and on this day the enemy once more exhibited signs of activity. A patrol of four men of the Notts Yeomanry was cut off at a place about ten miles north-west of camp. No Boers had been seen during the morning,

nor had any signs of their presence been detected. The story goes—it has been contradicted—that the men were engaged in dining off a fat turkey, when suddenly Boers appeared upon the scene and interrupted the feast. At all events, it is clear that the patrol was completely surprised. One man, although wounded, was successful in making his escape, but the other three were taken prisoners.

In consequence of this event, Lord Methuen despatched a strong force of Yeomanry and Kimberley Mounted Corps, at daylight on Friday, with orders to clear up the situation so far as practicable, but without allowing themselves to be drawn away to any great distance. In accordance with these instructions, Lord Chesham and Colonel Mahon (with whom, for a time, was also Lord Methuen in person) advanced to a commanding position about five miles N.N.W., their patrols being thrown out well in front to search the surrounding country. Boers were found in small parties in various directions, and bodies of about one hundred each were sighted to the front and right flank respectively. Very few shots were however exchanged, the enemy remaining fast on the kopjes, which our men naturally made no attempt to attack. Satisfied that whatever might be the actual numbers opposed to us, the enemy had, at all events, been considerably reinforced, Lord Chesham, at about 10.30 a.m., decided to return to camp as soon as one remaining operation had been completed. Colonel Rolleston's squadron of yeomanry were unanimously anxious to ascertain the

exact fate of their comrades who had been surprised upon the previous day, and yielding to this feeling, Lord Chesham somewhat reluctantly permitted Colonel Rolleston to make a dash at the distant kopje, about four miles to the north, where the catastrophe had occurred. Covered by its scouts, the squadron rapidly crossed the wide stretch of undulating veldt to the foot of the hills. Here the main body halted, well secured by parties thrown out at a wide interval upon both flanks, whilst Colonel Rolleston himself, with about a score of picked men, entered the bush and went forward to search the kopje. Meanwhile Lord Scarbrough, who had accompanied the squadron, took command. To our right, a considerable body of Boers could be seen on the kopjes about three miles distant, freely showing themselves upon the sky-line in a manner that experience tells us is not their wont unless present in force, and ere long the enemy was seen to be on the move in our direction, but whether with a view to cutting off the detachment in front or to interpose between the squadron and Lord Chesham's force in rear, it was impossible to determine. However, before matters became critical, Colonel Rolleston's party had completed a careful search of the kopje, and Lord Scarbrough accordingly gave the order to retire. No trace was found of the missing men, and the natural conclusion was that all three had been made prisoners. This assumption was confirmed on Saturday by the Boers themselves, who further informed us that none of the party had been wounded.

The reconnaissance was very well carried out, and as regards Colonel Rolleston's particular enterprise, it was especially gratifying to observe the combination of dash and precaution that characterized the entire proceeding. Everything was done, and nothing that was needed in order to assure all possible security was neglected.

Whilst the Notts men were thus engaged, Colonel Mahon swept round by the south-west with his two squadrons, thoroughly scouring the country not hitherto examined, and returned to camp without meeting any opposition or sighting any considerable body of the enemy. The fact had, however, been established, that instead of two or three dozen Boers hovering round, we had now two or three hundred at all events, and very possibly a much larger number. The want of horse artillery with Lord Methuen's column was greatly felt during this reconnaissance. Had a battery been present, all mystery to the north of the camp, in the direction taken by Colonel Rolleston's squadron, might readily have been cleared up—perhaps with loss to the enemy.

At the moment when they received the order to retire, Colonel Rolleston's party had secured a number of Boer horses which they were driving in; but their orders being peremptory, they were obliged to abandon them. The situation had, however, become so threatening, owing to the advance of the Boers on the right flank of our position, that the risk of losing men in order to capture horses was far too great to be lightly

incurred, and Lord Scarbrough was undeniably right in withdrawing his force without further delay. The retirement was steadily conducted in excellent order, and finally we regained the camp without having lost a man. On our arrival we were astonished to see unmistakable signs of an immediate move. Men were everywhere busy packing the wagons, and it speedily transpired that an order from Bloemfontein had been received, directing Lord Methuen to retire at once to Boshof.

At 2 p.m. we marched off, and within an hour afterwards, just as the head of the column was passing Spitz Kop, the flippant tones of a pom-pom on our right flank gave notice that the march was not to be unopposed. Fortunate, indeed, was it that the precautions taken against any attack, great or small, had been so carefully arranged, and the result consequently was never in doubt—although we were at first severely handicapped by the difficulty of obtaining artillery positions from which to reply to the Boer guns. Our mounted troops, however, worked manfully, and the right-flank guard, supported by the Northamptons, successfully beat all serious efforts of the enemy to head off the convoy. We had no less than 136 wagons stretching over a distance of more than two miles, not to mention 1000 sheep, and a large number of cattle and remount horses. To have brought in this large convoy without losing so much as a sheep, is an achievement that Lord Methuen and his troops may well be proud of; more especially perhaps as convoys,

as a rule, have been either less fortunate or less ably protected in other parts of the theatre of war. The critical period of the operation was the passage of a basin about three miles from camp, where the kopjes to the north and north-west, had they not been stoutly defended against the enemy, would certainly have enabled him to hold us at a very great disadvantage. Even as it was, the distant fire of the Boer artillery was not to be despised, although it, fortunately, had little or no effect. Besides one ox killed, I believe that no damage was done. The isolated hill named the Spitz Kop, which rises suddenly out of the basin, moreover afforded us considerable assistance, since the convoy whilst winding round below its eastern slope was completely protected. During the closing scenes of the action, the Spitz Kop, which was held by part of the rear-guard, almost too long, was the scene of some very hot fighting. The firing upon both sides was extremely heavy; but, thanks to the shelter of friendly boulders, our gallant yeomen suffered no loss, although there were several very narrow escapes.

It was during their retirement from the kopjes to the north and north-west of the Spitz Kop that our men suffered almost all of the comparatively trifling losses that we sustained. Two men killed, eleven wounded and unwounded prisoners, together with half a dozen other wounded, brought in by our own ambulances, was not a high price to pay for the safe withdrawal of so large a convoy. True, the enemy's strength probably did not exceed our own, but the nature of the country,

during the first five miles of the march, conferred infinite advantages upon the assailants, who, moreover, were at all events superior to the defenders in the number of their mobile troops. Where all did their best with such satisfactory results, it may seem invidious to find fault, but it is nevertheless needful to observe that there was a lack of system in the working of the flank guard covering the right of the column. The various units acted somewhat incoherently, failing in several cases to observe two cardinal principles of covering tactics. There was an absence of attention at times to giving mutual support, and the urgent need for anticipating the enemy upon successive positions as the fight rolled southwards was sometimes overlooked. From personal observation, I am sure that had the enemy been a little more enterprising, by sending forward, say, fifty men instead of half a dozen or so, he might have effectually forestalled our mounted troops upon the low kopjes north-west of Beck's Farm, from which the march of the convoy might have been subjected to considerable annoyance; although its actual security could no longer have been seriously endangered. Having passed Brackfontein, the column entered upon open veldt stretching far away towards the east and south, so that fire from the north-west could have been avoided by leaving the road and inclining eastwards. Yet, in order to have made their work perfect, the Yeomanry should have provided against even such a contingency as this. Of the gallantry and discipline of the Yeomanry it is impossible to speak too highly,

but they had still need to learn some few tricks of the trade from their adversaries. What our men so often failed to realize is that the top of a kopje is everything and the bottom of it nothing. Three men on a kopje can, for a time at all events, deny it to fifty, but fifty looking at it cannot prevent three from mounting from the other side and shooting down upon them. To deny positions to an enemy in the first place, is safer and cheaper than ejecting him in the second. I had myself a rather narrow shave near Beck's Farm, where I was going for the purpose of sending on our carts to Boshof. These had been at the head of the convoy, and had turned at Brackfontein, according to orders given before we marched off. It had been intended to encamp near Beck's, but the position was reported unsuitable, and Lord Methuen consequently decided to proceed to Boshof. Our servants very stupidly adhered to their instructions from me, instead of conforming to the route followed by the wagons behind them. I heard of what had occurred, and went off in some haste to put the matter right. I was only just in time. When I had arrived within about 800 yards of the farm I halted to have a look round, and, observing some men riding down the slope from Brackfontein, took out my glasses to discover whether they were friends or enemies. Having satisfied myself that they were friends, I put away my glasses and was just about to turn Jess round and go on, when a flash from the top of the low kopje about 150 yards to my left, and the sharp ping of a bullet, hastened my movements so

much that I failed to put my hat in its place—it had been pushed to the back of my head whilst using the field-glass—and as the mare spun round to be off, the hat flew away, and I was in no mind to wait and recover it. As I went, several more shots came pretty close; but within fifty yards I was round a corner and under cover. How the Boers missed me I cannot think. The first man to fire had a "sitting" shot. For the others there was some excuse. At Beck's I found the carts, and soon had them trotting in the direction of Boshof, whilst I rode quickly to report to General Douglas that a party of half a dozen Boers at least had got round our right flank. But the ubiquitous and keen-sighted Peakman had already detected the enemy, and soon put them to flight, though he had only four men with him.

On the morning after the fight Young and I accompanied the ambulance party sent under a flag of truce to bury our dead. We passed the Boer picquets without adventure, and within a few hundred yards north of the Spitz Kop were politely received by Commandant P. A. Cronje (second son of the captured general) and Assistant Commandant Dowthwaite, a man said to be of Scotch extraction. The Boer leaders gave permission for the ambulance to proceed to the line of kopjes east of where we stood, but directed that none of the burial party or others than Red Cross officers and men should advance further. My companion failed to hear the latter order, and when some Boers, including a doctor, galloped off to a kopje on our left, where a

wounded man was said to be lying, he instantly followed them. In vain British and Boers shouted and whistled, he appeared to be deaf. Cronje was, however, very nice about the matter, admitting that what had occurred was evidently a mistake, and that we had for our part done all that we could to stop the career of our comrade. The Boer doctor appears to have been equally ignorant of the orders given, since, after a fruitless search for the wounded man, he took my friend into the neighbouring laager, where he entertained him with coffee, etc. Thanks to the courtesy of Commandant Cronje, no difficulty was made about the return of the unauthorized visitor.

I had a certain amount of conversation with Cronje, but his slight acquaintance with the English language presented a difficulty. With Dowthwaite, upon the contrary, I talked a great deal. He told me that our expedition to Buitendam had been the cause of his coming down to these parts—apparently from Mafeking. Douglas' flying column appears to have been mistaken for the advanced guard of Lord Methuen's entire force, which was assumed to be undertaking a march eastwards. Dowthwaite expressed himself as deeply disappointed that the supposition which had brought him here had not proved correct. In his opinion the Boers had been deprived of a favourable opportunity. He further remarked, somewhat dolefully, that he had been without a change of clothes for a fortnight. With reference to the previous day's fight, Dowthwaite contended that two more hours of daylight must have

yielded great results for the Boers. This must, however, have been merely "bounce," since the enemy could have done us no real harm after we had reached the open veldt, and had they there pressed on, the chances are that we, instead of they, might have secured sundry advantages. A rebel "minister" from Stellenbosch was with the Boer leaders, and his bearing contrasted most unfavourably with theirs. He was as tactless as they were the contrary, and was the only person amongst perhaps a hundred of our friends the enemy, with whom we were then brought in peaceable contact, whose act or word was otherwise than absolutely nice.

It was an impressive sight when our two poor fellows were buried side by side, in the ground on which they had gallantly fallen. There, by the grave, all joining with equal reverence in the burial service, about a score of Britishers and rather more than double that number of Boers stood together, their quarrel forgotten in the presence of the dead. When all was over, we parted with mutual farewells that were, I firmly believe, perfectly cordial and genuine on both sides. The fact is, that the war has given Britons and Boers good cause to respect each other, and in the discovery of each other's good points lies the best hope of future good will throughout the Dominion of British South Africa.

Methuen's column was now once more established at Boshof, and from all appearances likely to remain for some days to come. Very rightly it had been decided that no forward movement should be made until the whole army was in a condition to advance

simultaneously. The pity is that this wise determination was not arrived at in the first instance. The marchings and counter marchings already ordered had been productive of nothing but wear and tear of the troops and general loss of moral effect. Nor is it easy to understand what was the motive of the proposed move of this column towards Hoopstad, whilst the Boer commando at Fourteen Streams remained not only undefeated, but not even vigorously assailed. Had Lord Methuen's advance been continued, his communications must have been in considerable danger from the superior Boer army on his left rear. It was well to recall him, but it would have been better to have refrained from despatching him.

The vacillation displayed by the Headquarter authorities with reference to the operations about Kimberley is remarkable. Lord Methuen was first ordered to march to Griquatown, but when the greater part of the journey had been accomplished he was recalled to Kimberley. Then he was directed to concentrate a column at Boshof and move with all possible speed on Hoopstad. Two days' march beyond Boshof, at Mahemsfontein, he received an order to halt, which compelled him to retire to Zwartkopjesfontein, owing to the absence of grazing and fuel at Mahemsfontein. Finally came the order which recalled him to Boshof.

General Douglas had been far from well at Zwart Kopjes, and had intended to drive from thence to Boshof; but the attack on the column caused him to

mount his horse, and this for a man seriously threatened with dysentery was a severe ordeal. The result was that for many days at Boshof he was very bad indeed. Fortunately nothing occurred during this time to call upon him for any exertion. There were a few skirmishes on the outpost lines, but otherwise things kept quite quiet.

It is surprising that the enemy made no attempt upon Lord Methuen's communications with Kimberley. Posts had been established at Frankfort and at intermediate places; but had the Boers been really active, we should have had a great deal of trouble. The 5th Fusiliers celebrated St. George's Day, April 23, according to their usual custom, and this was the greatest event of the week ending Saturday, April 28. Upon this day I received a telegram from Kimberley, from which I gathered that the Mafeking Relief Expedition was really upon the point of departure. Curiously enough, Young, who intended to accompany me, received, almost at the same moment, instructions to proceed to Bloemfontein—much to our mutual annoyance. The mischief was that he could not explain why he did not wish to obey these instructions, and was compelled to make all sorts of excuses instead of saying plainly that he proposed to go to Mafeking, and thus giving away the secret. However, he set out with me for Kimberley on Sunday, April 29, and on arrival at that place, to our great joy, he had a wire which once more set him free to go where he pleased. Thus we were able to make preparations for a joint expedition.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RELIEF OF MAFEKING: BRIGADIER MAHON'S FLYING COLUMN.

QUITTING Lord Methuen's column at Boshof on Sunday afternoon, April 29, we reached Kimberley on the following morning. That a relief column was about to start for Mafeking had become pretty generally known, but whether the enterprise would take the form of an advance in force, after defeating the Boers at Fourteen Streams, or be a dash round the enemy's flank executed by mounted troops, only the favoured few could tell, and these naturally kept their information to themselves. I had, however, arranged with a friend at Kimberley to send me a wire couched in language that I could interpret, in the event of anything important being on the *tapis*, and this message having reached me on Saturday night, I waited at Boshof only long enough to make sundry transport arrangements which I had afterwards good reason to regret, and then made haste to Kimberley, where particulars of the impending operations could be obtained. Having ascertained that Colonel Mahon with a "Flying Column" was to make an immediate effort for the relief of Mafeking, it need scarcely be said that I was most anxious to accompany him. But

it was clear at the same time that by so doing I should certainly miss most, if not all, of the much more extensive operations which were expected to be commenced by General Hunter's Division. Consequently, before making a final decision, I wired an enigmatical telegram to Amery at Capetown, who fortunately understood my meaning and advised me to use my own discretion. Consequently I decided to throw in my lot with the Flying Column; the relief of Mafeking being, in my opinion, the enterprise of most importance, although to be attempted by a comparatively insignificant force—only about 1100 of all ranks.

Before leaving Boshof I had disposed of the "weagon," and also of Kruger, Steyn, and Cronje, and purchased a small ox-wagon. My idea being that I should thus be enabled to carry forage for Jess and a pony, without having any other horses to feed by the way. The six oxen would of course live on the veldt. Upon our arrival at Kimberley, however, I learned that only mule transport was being taken with the Flying Column, and was told that oxen would have no chance of keeping up! I did not agree with this view, my own experience being that with fat oxen and a light load it is by no means impossible to keep up with mules. However, I allowed myself to be persuaded—foolishly, I think—and having sold the ox-wagon, purchased a Cape cart with four horses. I lost nothing over the ox-wagon, and, considering the condition of the market at the time, did not pay extravagantly for the cart and horses. I also bought a capital chestnut pony, whom I named

"Solomon," after the dealer from whom I obtained him. The leaders were christened "Kruger" and "Steyn," and the wheelers "Cronje" and "Joubert." Young also purchased a similar outfit, with the exception that he was unable to find a second riding pony, and had to pin his faith upon the unaided efforts of "Little Bobs."

Arendse and Cornelius had already given place to Abraham and Hoven. I had had differences of opinion with the original pair. The change was very much for the better.

The Flying Column included M Battery Royal Horse Artillery under Major Jackson, the Kimberley Mounted Corps under Lieut.-Colonel King, the Imperial Light Horse under Lieut.-Colonel Edwards, a composite company composed of detachments of twenty-five men under an officer from each battalion of the Fusilier Brigade, and two Pom-poms under Captain Robinson, R.A. Thus, this little force was thoroughly representative of the Empire; Royal Horse Artillery and Colonial Corps, and the infantry company of the "Union" Brigade—English, Scotch, Irish and Welsh soldiers.

The staff officers were as follows:

Brigadier: Colonel Mahon, D.S.O., 8th Hussars.

Brigade Major: Captain Bell-Smythe, King's Dragoon Guards.

A.D.C.: Captain H.S.H. Prince Alexander of Teck, 7th Hussars.

D.A.A.G. (b): Major Sir John Willoughby, late Royal Horse Guards.

Galloper: Captain F. W. Smith, Imperial Light Horse.

Chief Intelligence Officer: Colonel Frank Rhodes, late Royal Dragoons.

Assistants: Major Baden-Powell, Scots Guards; Major Hon. Maurice Gifford, attached to Imperial Yeomanry.

Commanding Royal Artillery: Major Jackson, R.H.A.

Supply Officer: Captain Cobbe, 9th Bengal Lancers.

Transport Officer: Major Samuel Weil, Imperial Yeomanry.

The column assembled at Barkly West during Wednesday and Thursday, May 2 and 3, and on Friday, the 4th, we set out, marching, however, only a short distance to a place called Greef Putts, which from my point of view has a most appropriate name. The wheel horses of my cart escaped from the "boy" whilst grazing in the bush, and I have never seen them since. Both were "knee-haltered," and had been seen within five minutes of their disappearance. Consequently they must either have been bred in the neighbourhood, and made off straight for home, or else they were stolen —which matters not. The disaster was equally serious, whatever may have been the cause. Fortunately, the transport officer came to my rescue by offering to carry my forage, and with this assistance I succeeded in keeping up with the column. Yet the leaders were but ponies, the roads terribly rough, and the cart heavy, so that unless I could obtain further help or get horses at

Vryburg my chances of reaching Mafeking seemed somewhat doubtful.

The march during the first few days was otherwise uneventful, no opposition being met with. Cronje left Fourteen Streams on the 3rd, in order to intercept us, but does not appear to have given us credit for the rapidity that marked our movements. No doubt the fact that the column included infantry was duly brought to the knowledge of the Boer leader, and for once the very excellence of his intelligence department proved an evil rather than an advantage to him. The number of infantry was no doubt much exaggerated, and hence the mistake. At all events, we succeeded in getting safely round the Boer positions about Fourteen Streams, and were soon so far advanced on our way that it became impracticable for Cronje to catch us up with a force strong enough to defeat us. Moreover, the enemy had quite enough to do in defending himself against General Hunter, whose action at Rooi Dam was fought with the express purpose of preventing Cronje from attacking the Flying Column.

Of armed Boers between Kimberley and Vryburg we saw none, but a score or more of notable rebels were captured, together with sundry rifles and a considerable amount of ammunition. The Vryburg district contains many Boers, said to have been sent thereto by Mr. Kruger to occupy farms bought with secret service money—the object, of course, being to import voters favourable to "The Bond." I have this on excellent authority, but cannot absolutely vouch for the truth of

the statement. Personally, I believe it fully, and there is every probability of its accuracy.

Speaking just now about the capture of rebels reminds me of an amusing incident. I was with the officer commanding the advanced guard near Bank's Drift on Monday, April 7, when a wagon was brought in by a flanking patrol. Sitting inside was a fat old woman, apparently hostile. The officer called for a man who could speak Dutch, in order to have an interview with the lady, who, however, cut short these preliminaries by observing, "Shure I don't want any of yer Dutch—I'm Mrs. McGreer!"

The column entered Vryburg on the afternoon of April 9, not only unopposed but undisturbed even by rumours of hostile bodies being in the neighbourhood. The Transvaal officials had cleared a couple of days before we reached the town, one of them carrying in a box at the back of his cart the moneys collected during the term of his office. Whether these funds have subsequently been devoted to the service of the republics or to the personal benefit of a single individual, I cannot tell.

Vryburg is a pretty little town, wanting only a background of high hills to render it picturesque. It is situated upon and under the southern slope of a great roll of the veldt, being therefore what is termed in the west of England "back sunded," to some extent, and the gardens must consequently suffer from the cold south winds and winter frosts.

Wood for fuel was one of the difficulties which the

Flying Column had to contend against. We could not carry it, and were therefore obliged to "live on the country." Doors, windows, fences, gates, and all sorts of things had to burn in order that the soldier might cook his dinner. Dry wood near the Vryburg camp proved even more scarce than it had been elsewhere; but close at hand stood a tumble-down looking building. This was speedily assailed with axes, and hearing the noise and guessing the cause, I repaired to the spot armed with a small hatchet, whilst my servants were attending to the horses. Just as I reached the scene of action an infuriated little party of staff officers also arrived to stop the proceedings. The building, it turned out, was the stable of the Mounted Police Barracks—in short, Government property! The soldiers were soon sent off to seek other sources of wood-supply, and one man who was carrying off a doorpost was ordered to leave it on the ground. This doorpost, when all was quiet again, I was fortunate enough to secure; and half an hour afterwards it was usefully employed under the frying-pan, in which the lamb chops for our dinner were pleasantly hissing.

From all accounts, the railway to Mafeking had been left practically uninjured for nearly fifty miles north of Vryburg, and to the south the damage did not seem to be great. Therefore we had good hope that General Hunter's troops would be able to reopen the line for traffic before very long. The future movements of the Flying Column, of course, depended very much upon the rapidity with which the railway could be repaired

behind us. Supplies would be required at Mafeking before we could start for Pretoria, and if these were seriously delayed we feared that we might fail to reach our destination until after its occupation by Lord Roberts' army. So far everything had gone well. We learned that the passage of the Vaal at Fourteen Streams had been forced by General Hunter, and that the Boer positions on the northern bank had been captured. We had heard the big guns as we marched by on Saturday about twenty-five miles west of the Rooi Dam battle-field.

It was dark on the evening of our arrival at Vryburg before we were properly settled down in camp, the convoy having been a long way in rear of the advanced guard, with which Young and I had entered the town, and until the baggage had come up we could not do much in the way of searching for a pair of horses. In the morning, however, following up a clue obtained upon the previous evening, I was successful, and "Bruhn" and "Vryburg" replaced the absent Generals Cronje and Joubert. Both were given to jibbing, but Abraham was a fine whip, and managed to get them along very well as a rule. At all events, the horses never jibbed in crossing "drifts," and therefore their occasional misconduct was of but little consequence.

Having remained at Vryburg during the whole of Thursday, May 10, the Brigadier continued his march at 6 p.m. The guide lost his way, and after a very tedious march until 2 a.m. the following morning, we

halted cold and hungry, and without any water for the animals. The march was therefore resumed at 6.30, and at 8.15 we reached Majoiner Mabili—commonly called "Johnny Mabili"—having then completed about twenty-two miles from Vryburg.

Here Young bought two pounds of salt butter—probably made in County Cork — under the fond impression that he was being supplied with the fresh product of the churn. He still objects to being reminded of this incident, therefore I recall it for his especial benefit. The butter was, moreover, rancid, and utterly uneatable by any white man. Our Kaffirs profited accordingly.

In the afternoon we marched thirteen miles to a small farm — name forgotten — thus completing thirty-five miles in twenty-five hours. Here we met an officer named (I think) Marsden, who had safely reached us after a very adventurous career. First he had penetrated the Boer lines by night, and thus obtained an interview with Baden-Powell, with whom he discussed the situation upon behalf of Colonel Plumer, to whom he returned and reported. Then riding south, he made for the Flying Column, in order to bring information to Colonel Mahon. He was very surprised to find us so far advanced on our march, and delighted us infinitely by the assurance that everything was still going on well at Mafeking.

Next morning, May 12, at 6.30, we marched to Jackall's Pan, and then in the afternoon continued onwards to Fraser's farm at Setlagoli. The total

distance of this day's march was less than sixteen miles, but a bad "drift" had delayed us very much. The Frasers were kindness itself, and supplied us with all sorts of things at most reasonable rates, including a quantity of forage. About a mile north-east of the farm is a small fort built on a kopje by Sir Charles Warren during the Bechuanaland Expedition. In answer to questions from Baden-Powell and Plumer as to the strength and condition of his column, Colonel Mahon sent replies that would have puzzled the Boers had they cut off the messenger. Here are the questions and answers seriatim.

Question 1. What is the strength of your column?

Answer 1. "Naval and Military" × 10 (= 94 Piccadilly × 10).

Question 2. How many guns?

Answer 2. Equals number of sons in Ward Family (= 6).

Question 3. How off for supplies?

Answer. Ask the C.O. 9th Lancers ("Small"—Little).

Krai Pan.

On Sunday, 13th, at 6.15 a.m., the column set out from Setlagoli and marched about eight miles to its breakfast outspan, near Brodie's Farm. The Brigadier was quite aware that a Boer force held the Koodoos Rand ridges, blocking his route by the direct road to Mafeking. He was well content to leave the enemy sitting there, and swept off to his left so as to turn the

position simply by marching past it. This proceeding must have annoyed the Boers very much. No doubt they expected the Flying Column to run its head against a brick wall after the accustomed fashion of British forces; at all events, they must in that case have been disappointed.

At 2.30 p.m. we continued our march through an undulating bush veldt, of which it is providential that the enemy failed to take early advantage. Clouds of dust, and sometimes bodies of horsemen, could be seen at and about the Koodoos Rand from a very short time after we commenced the afternoon march. Soon our scouts on the right flank came in contact with those of the Boers, who, however, retired before our men. The head of the convoy made a short halt in order to permit the tail to close up, but otherwise the march continued throughout the action almost without interruption until dusk, when the Brigadier decided to halt until his scouts should have made certain about the proper line to the Maratsani.

At 3.40 the firing upon the right increased in intensity, and many Boers were reported to have been seen galloping from the direction of the Koodoos Rand towards our right front. Jackson's guns now unlimbered, but after waiting for some time without any target presenting itself, they moved forward once more, still keeping upon the exposed flank. The bush was everywhere thick, and the approaches therefore easy for the enemy under folds of the ground, had not our gallant Imperial Light Horse and

Kimberleys proved generally quite as clever as the Boers themselves.

By 4.35 the firing was general on the right flank and in front, and the guns, which had once more unlimbered—the pom-poms also taking post to cover the front of our advance—were soon to have their chance. Just at this moment the attention of those of us who were with the General was diverted from the skirmishing around by the sudden outbreak of a very heavy fire, directed against the right front of the column where we then were, and at quite a short range. Mr. Hands, of the *Daily Mail*, fell badly wounded almost immediately, and a good many men dropped here and there, whilst, in the convoy itself, mules and drivers were also getting a baddish time of it. The Fusilier Company formed a line behind the crest of a rising wave of ground, from which they had a fair view of the approaches to their front, the bush just at this part being not quite so thick as elsewhere. Personally I was very glad indeed to get behind the same friendly shelter, after catching Solomon, who had just begun to enjoy a nice patch of grazing. During the time it lasted—just ten minutes—this fire was the hottest I have ever known, and it is really a marvel that there were not more casualties. Most of the bullets, however, seemed to go high. The convoy wheeled to the left so as to gain shelter where the ground fell away slightly to the westward, and soon reached comparative safety.

At 4.45 our guns and pom-poms—at last finding a visible target, opened upon the enemy with almost

instantaneous effect, and at 5.5, the fight being over, the guns limbered up and resumed their normal position at the head of the convoy. For a few moments the situation had been distinctly unpleasant, although, thanks to the fine quality of the troops, it was never for even one moment perilous.

What had happened was that the advanced guard, finding the enemy recoiling before their vehement offensive, had pushed onwards so rapidly that the right flank guard, heavily engaged with the enemy opposed to them, could not keep up, and a gap thus opened on our right front. The enemy here finding their way clear before them, pushed onwards through the interval, and thus arrived within easy range of the main column and the convoy. But the right flank guard pushing fiercely against them, and the guns also having succeeded in bringing their fire to bear upon them, these adventurous Boers were swiftly driven back, and their comrades making no real effort to support them, they were compelled to fly from the field. The behaviour of the British troops was quite excellent, and the victory was well deserved. We lost five killed, twenty wounded, including Major Mullins of the Imperial Light Horse, and one missing. The Boer loss will never be known, for the simple reason that as the column continued its march before daylight, the ground over which the enemy had advanced was not properly searched, and in any case the bodies were probably removed during the night. However, as the Kaffirs who were commandeered by the Boers to dig

WATERING HORSES.

Watering horses in the bed of the Maratsani. Lieut.-Colonel Peakman, Kimberley Mounted Corps, stands by the grey horse which carried him throughout the defence of Kimberley, and which was subsequently killed under him.

[*To face p.* 246.

the graves declare that they buried twenty-two men, we may safely claim to have at all events inflicted upon the enemy a loss exceeding our own. Our ambulance picked up one wounded Boer, but the rest, at their own request, were left for their own friends to remove, and received only such treatment as was immediately necessary.

As soon as all was over, Colonel Mahon caused his wagons to be parked as if for the night, and ordered the troops to form their bivouacs. This seems to have completely deceived the enemy, and as the result we were enabled to march at daylight and effect the passage of the Maratsani river without the smallest opposition. We had bivouacked without water, and had counted upon a plentiful supply at the Maratsani, but were disappointed. The river was quite dry, and we were compelled to dig holes in the sand by means of which the horses and mules were laboriously and, I fear, insufficiently watered. This might have proved disastrous, but when animals are really well cared for and suffer no privations of this sort as a rule, they easily put up with occasional scarcity. We remained by the river on a good position until 3 p.m. when, the animals having had a really good feed, we set forth to accomplish the long march of over twenty miles to the Molopo river, on which we hoped to effect a junction with Plumer. At 8.30 p.m. we outspanned till 1 a.m. on Tuesday, when we continued our march and reached the Molopo at 8.30, exactly twelve hours after leaving the Maratsani. Shortly after daylight our scouts

reported a force approaching the north bank of the river, and soon after it was found that we were actually in touch with Plumer's column, which reached Jan Mabissi's just half an hour before the head of Mahon's column crossed the river and joined hands with it. Here it was that we heard the glorious news of Baden-Powell's fight upon the previous Saturday, when a determined attack upon Mafeking resulted not only in the defeat of the enemy but in the capture of over 100 prisoners, including the notorious Eloff—who with all his faults has at all events proved himself to be a plucky fellow and a fine leader of men.

We were now only eighteen miles from Mafeking, which lay almost due east of Jan Mabissi's, and all ranks felt perfect confidence in the result of whatever fighting might follow. The march of the Canadian Artillery under Major Hudon, and the Queensland Mounted Infantry under Major Kelly, who, in order to catch up Plumer, marched on foot no less than twenty-eight miles on the 14th, was a fine performance, more especially when it is remembered that since the men disembarked at Beira, they had, practically speaking, spent all their time in the train. The dismounted portion of the Rhodesian Regiment also marched the same distance, and although these men were fully acclimatized, it must be remembered that they had not been accustomed to covering long distances except on horseback.

Finally, just to give one more instance of the fine spirit that animated this gallant little force, it should

MAHON'S HEADQUARTERS.

The Brigadier's headquarters were under the shade of the big Mimosa tree. The man with the bucket over his shoulder is going towards the river to draw water. It was here that Plumer joined forces with Mahon.

[*To face p.* 248.

be mentioned that Lieutenant Watson, of the Kimberley Mounted Corps, who was on sick leave at Cape Town, heard of the march to Mafeking, hurried back to the front, and having ridden absolutely alone all the way from Barkly West, joined the column on Sunday just in time for the fight, having covered 220 miles in five days. With such officers and men, a commander may safely face pretty long odds.

Colonel Plumer's column numbered rather less than 700 of all ranks, and included the following units :—

B.S.A.P., three squadrons, Lieut.-Colonel Bodle.

Queensland Mounted Infantry, Major Kelly.

*Rhodesian Regiment, five squadrons, Major Pilson (half squadron dismounted for want of horses).

South Rhodesian Volunteers, one troop, Captain Ramsay.

Canadian Artillery, four 12-pounder guns, Major Hudon.

One Vickers-Maxim, 12½-pounder, Captain H. P. De Montmorency.†

Three 7-pounder M.L. mountain guns, Captain Llewellen. (The latter officer being actually in command of the mixed battery.)

The combined columns remained for the night at Jan Mabissi's (deserted kraal) to thoroughly rest the horses against the trying day that was certain to follow.

At 7.30 a.m. on Wednesday, May 16, began the

* The original strength of this corps had been twenty-two officers and 428 men. Its casualties up to March 31 amounted to eleven officers and ninety-five men killed and wounded.

† Cousin of the famous leader of the "Scouts."

march which was destined to relieve Mafeking and thereby to set the whole British Empire wild with joy. The Flying Column occupied the left of the line, with Plumer's on the right, reaching to the Molopo river and astride of it—the Police being upon the southern bank, where they had a rough time a little later on and acquitted themselves most manfully. At noon the column halted to water and feed about a mile on the Mafeking side of Ralokutwe, and between that kraal and the Malopo river. A Boer force was reported in front of us at a distance of about two miles, and at 1.45, after some little skirmishes between patrols upon both sides of the river, the Imperial Light Horse on the left front became heavily engaged. At 2.10 Colonel Mahon, having by this time gained a fair idea of the situation, and the ground in front and flanks being covered to his satisfaction, brought up Jackson's guns and also Robinson's pom-poms, all of which were speedily in action. Ten minutes later the fighting became general, and the artillery as well as riflemen on both sides were firing for all they were worth. Our convoy was meanwhile crawling slowly over the veldt towards a hollow in rear of the left centre where there was complete shelter, but as they went the Boer shells kept falling thickly amongst the wagons. A Maxim-Vickers 12½-pounder, which had been posted in an admirably selected position just in rear of a single but wide-spreading mimosa tree facing the centre of the British line, was especially active and charmingly impartial in its choice of targets. The position of this gun was for a

long time undetected, but its eventual discovery soon led to its hasty withdrawal.

Plumer's force, which was directing its attack against Israel Malama's farm, where the Boer left touched the Malopo river, was now fighting hard, and though holding its own, unable to gain ground.

At 2.45 the firing on the left slackened slightly, but only because before pushing on Colonel Edwards awaited reinforcements, which were already on their way to support the fight in that part of the field, and by 3 p.m. the firing resumed and soon exceeded its former intensity. The ridge just to the left rear of the convoy which by this time had gained its place of security in the hollow, was also occupied as a precautionary measure, so as to provide against contingencies. On the right, the British South African Police were fighting hard, and finding a further advance for the time impracticable, fell back a short distance to good cover, from which they effectually checked every effort of the enemy to push them further. A large number of Boers, amounting to about 700 men, showed themselves freely on the sky line on the heights south of the river, and a very heavy fire of artillery and pom-poms was directed against our right rear. But the brigadier had complete confidence in Lieut.-Colonel Peakman, who had command of the rear-guard, and right well did this gallant officer fulfil the trust committed to him. A considerable number of mounted Boers, galloping down by the village of Saani, gained the bed of the Molopo river, and from thence sought to

assail the rear-guard, but so accurate was the fire of the party of Kimberley Mounted Corps, that the enemy was not only checked but was also unable to retire. These Boers were kept practically prisoners in the river-bed until nightfall, when they made their escape in the dark. Peakman's success was due to his own cleverness in choosing his ground, by which he avoided losses to his own men, whilst at the same time securing a perfect command over all the approaches to his position. Yet the trial, in spite of the excellent cover, was no light one. As I watched the shells pitching all over Peakman's position, it seemed to me to be almost impossible that heavy losses were not being sustained. The practical immunity that was actually enjoyed affords a lesson to many who have refused to believe the statements of the Boers as to their own trifling losses under very similar circumstances upon very many occasions.

At 3.40 p.m., Jackson's guns changed position towards the north to a higher point of the ridge in order to engage the Boer quick-firer, whose position under the mimosa tree had at last been detected. This move resulted in the speedy withdrawal of the enemy's gun, and consequently relieved the pressure previously exercised on Peakman's rear-guard, on which this gun had fired heavily from time to time, and dangerously also, since it enfiladed the position.

Ground was now being gained continuously by the left wing, under the clever leadership of Lieut.-Colonel Edwards, whose own corps, the Imperial Light Horse,

led the advance with the skill and courage that they have so consistently displayed throughout the war. In the centre, where the brigadier had his station, the resistance had grown feeble on the withdrawal of the 12½-pounder quick-firer, and the Fusilier company, with the dismounted Rhodesians, were ordered to advance across the vale which divided the opposing positions. At 4.25 a general advance was ordered, Robinson's pom-poms being sent to the right front to deal with a number of Boers observed in retreat. I took a photograph of the pom-poms limbering up, but the film was a bad one, and the picture is scarcely capable of satisfactory reproduction. At 5 p.m., Plumer, commanding the right attack, reported all going well, but that he would like to have assistance against Israel Malama's farm, which was still being held stubbornly against him. Jackson's guns accordingly joined in the bombardment already being conducted by the Canadians further to the right, but at this juncture the enemy fled, and the farm was soon in the hands of our troops. The fight was now practically over. The general advance was continued for about a mile, the convoy following after us and crashing its way through the bush in the fast-gathering darkness. Then the brigadier wisely decided to halt until the moon had risen, and meanwhile sent forward Major Karri Davis, with six volunteers of the Imperial Light Horse, to announce the victory to Baden-Powell, and report that the relief column would enter Mafeking during the night.

The battle had been well won, the enemy having been pushed back over three miles and parted right asunder, so that no Boers remained in front of the column. Our loss, moreover, had been slight, only about thirty casualties all told. The scene of the combat was the southern slope of the veldt north of the Molopo, from which great easy spurs, with valleys of similar character between them, run down to the river. Upon two of these spurs were the main lines of the opposing positions. There was a sprinkling of bush everywhere, with a dense tract on the right front of the enemy. On the south side of the river the heights rise more abruptly, especially east of Saani—that is, to our right front. On these heights the enemy had at least two guns and several hundred men, probably from 700 to 800, who freely showed themselves moving along the hills in the direction of our rear.

It seems clear that the idea in the mind of the Boer commander was that by assailing us on both flanks, and showing a strong force on our right moving apparently to attack us in rear, he would frighten us into thinking more of defending ourselves than of attacking our enemy. He forgot, however, that Colonel Mahon knew the entire strength of the besieging force to be no more than 3000, of whom at least 1000 would certainly be needed to keep in check the garrison of Mafeking. Consequently, when he saw large numbers of the enemy on the hills to his right, and found his left also assailed, Colonel Mahon could scarcely fail to argue that the opposition in front was unlikely to be

POM-POMS COMING UP.

General advance. Pom-pom teams coming up. Capt. Robinson is standing just in rear of the left gun.

[*To face p.* 254.

very strong. Therefore, in place of halting to await attack, he promptly pushed onwards, with the excellent results that have done such credit to his cool judgment and readiness of resource. Lieut.-Colonels Plumer and Edwards, commanding the right and left wings, and Lieut.-Colonel Peakman, commanding the rear-guard, proved worthy lieutenants to their gallant leader. It was because the troops were well handled that this brilliant little action had so successful a termination.

What might have happened had the Boers attempted real business instead of trying to frighten Mahon with a "bogie," it is hard to say. They might have concentrated on their main position, with a false flank on the heights south of the Molopo, and a strong offensive flank in the thick bush to their right front. A fierce counter-attack based upon this bush, and falling on our left, might have caused considerable trouble. Hampered with his convoy, Mahon was almost incapable of tactical manœuvres in a bush country; and to a direct frontal attack, manœuvre is the only alternative, if ground is to be gained.

At midnight the column commenced its march on Mafeking, and at 4 a.m., Thursday, May 17, the head of it arrived on its camping-ground, west of the railway station. I was only just in time for the meeting of Baden-Powell and Mahon, having stupidly mistaken a right-flank guard for the advanced guard, and remained with it for a long time before discovering the mistake. Young, whom I had lost in the dark, was more fortunate, and entering Mafeking with the

advanced guard was regaled with hot cocoa at the headquarter mess. I envied him very much, for I could get nothing hot myself until after daylight, fires in the camp being necessarily prohibited. During the day there was some little skirmishing but no serious fighting, as the Boers gave way in all directions. Snyman's main laager was captured about 10 a.m.; but the enemy succeeded in removing almost everything of value—one small gun and a few stores represented the extent of our booty. The relief column, as a whole, had had too much hard work to be capable of an effective pursuit, but it would seem as if more use might have been made of Plumer's force, a considerable part of which was comparatively fresh. Yet, Baden-Powell had to decide this question on the spot, and it is more easy to criticize after the event than to do the right thing at the actual moment.

A number of official telegrams found in Snyman's laager furnished much amusement. I had a copy of the collection, but have unfortunately mislaid it, otherwise a few extracts should now have been quoted.

Shortly before noon, Baden-Powell, Mahon, and Plumer rode into the town at the head of the troops, the town-guard lining the streets. There was much enthusiasm. The Mayor, Mr. Whiteley, read an address, and after mutual congratulations and much cheering the troops marched to their camps, and the town guard was dismissed.

A BARRICADE AT MAFEKING. [*To face p.* 256.

CHAPTER XIX.

MAFEKING, JOHANNESBURG, AND HOME.

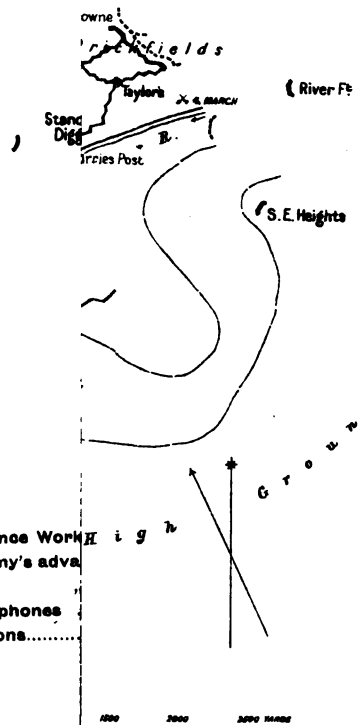
THE siege of Mafeking ended officially at 10 a.m. on May the 17th, this being the hour at which the Boer headquarters at the main laager, east of the town, broke up camp and commenced to retreat. Actually, however, at least one condition of the state of siege continued to be felt, since the garrison remained for some days very badly off for supplies, and the "siege loaf," a marvellous and not altogether dainty compound of various farinaceous substances, was still issued as rations to the troops and to the townsfolk. A tiny, dark-looking roll weighing half a pound was the daily ration to each person. Of meat there was already plenty. A considerable herd of captured cattle had been driven in with Colonel Mahon's column, and large quantities were almost immediately procured in the neighbourhood. But of other supplies there was practically nothing. A trainload from Bulawayo was anxiously expected, and actually arrived on the Queen's birthday; but from the south there could be no immediate expectations, nor had we any tidings whatever of what had transpired since we left Kimberley. Not a word had come from General

Hunter, and we could only conjecture that he had gone east from Fourteen Streams along the northern bank of the Vaal, probably marching on Klerksdorp, whilst Lord Methuen, upon the south bank, secured the communications with Kimberley. A very pretty combination upon the strategical chess-board seemed to present itself in the idea of Hunter acting as a left flank guard to the army of the Commander-in-Chief, and in the event of the Boers making a stand on the Vaal, being ready to execute a turning movement upon the enemy's side of the river, whilst our column, marching from Mafeking, would in turn protect Hunter's left, and should the Boers oppose his turning movement with an entrenched position facing westwards, act in his favour just as he would himself do for Roberts.

I spent a good deal of time, after my arrival, in riding round the defences of Mafeking, and was amazed at the ingenuity and perseverance that had been displayed by the garrison. The tiny fortress seems to have kept growing, both in strength and extent, day by day—or, more accurately, night by night—throughout the memorable siege. The amount of excavation accomplished is positively stupendous. I had already a fair idea of what had been done, from looking at the works themselves; but when Colonel Baden-Powell showed me a plan of the defences—which he had just completed in order to enclose with his official report—I realized, as I had failed to do before, the real magnitude of the task which had been accomplished. The perimeter of the place at the commencement of the

SIEGE (

Sketch to sho Race Course
at the



Defence Work
Enemy's adva
Do
Telephones
Actions.....

(To face page 258)

siege was comparatively small, but by degrees it became extended as the necessities of the case, or the adventurous spirit of the garrison, called for the occupation of fresh ground. Thus, instead of the lines of defence being contracted as the siege progressed, the contrary was the case. Yet the effects of the bombardment, to which the battered buildings of the little town bore witness more eloquent than any words, must have been truly terrific, and the ordeal so heroically endured has but few parallels in history. Compared with Kimberley, and taking into consideration the relative areas of the two towns, more damage was done in a single street in Mafeking than in the whole of Kimberley. That actually more houses were hit in Mafeking than in Kimberley, I am certain. In Kimberley it was often necessary to look round carefully for traces of the bombardment, and frequently none could be detected—although, of course, in some places they were plentiful—but in Mafeking, go where you would, unmistakable evidences were ever before the eyes.

Splendid, however, as was the spirit that animated all sorts and conditions of men throughout the siege, it is impossible to avoid a special concentration of truly romantic interest upon the repulse of Eloff's attempted assault in the night of Saturday, May 12th. In order to realize completely the glory won upon that occasion by Baden-Powell and his "illustrious garrison," it is necessary to consider the conditions existing at the time of this gallant episode.

For many weeks the troops had been on short rations,

and the end was almost in sight. Nothing could have prevented the fall of Mafeking within a fortnight, unless its relief should actually have been effected. Rumours there were that a relief column was on the march, but, according to the latest news, there was but a mere chance of the siege being raised before the time when the little force must yield to hunger. It would have been but natural had the garrison already fallen into a state of complete despondency. Finally, when in the middle of that eventful night the enemy were found to have penetrated the defences and reached almost to the very heart of the town, it falls scarcely short of the miraculous that all should have risen as one man to eject the intruders. So gallantly and so skilfully were the counter-operations conducted that not only was the bulk of the enemy driven out, defeated, and disgraced, but over one hundred prisoners were captured after being themselves besieged in the very works that they had carried a few hours previously! The defenders laboured under every possible disadvantage. Surprised by an enemy, whose success in carrying the works must obviously have encouraged him to a high pitch of enthusiasm and confidence, the defenders of Mafeking rallied round their brave Commander, and added to their roll of fame an exploit which can never be forgotten throughout Her Majesty's Empire. Only such a deed could have overshadowed the heroism already displayed. Had Mafeking fallen that night she would yet have fallen gloriously. She has, however, survived all her trials and become even more illustrious.

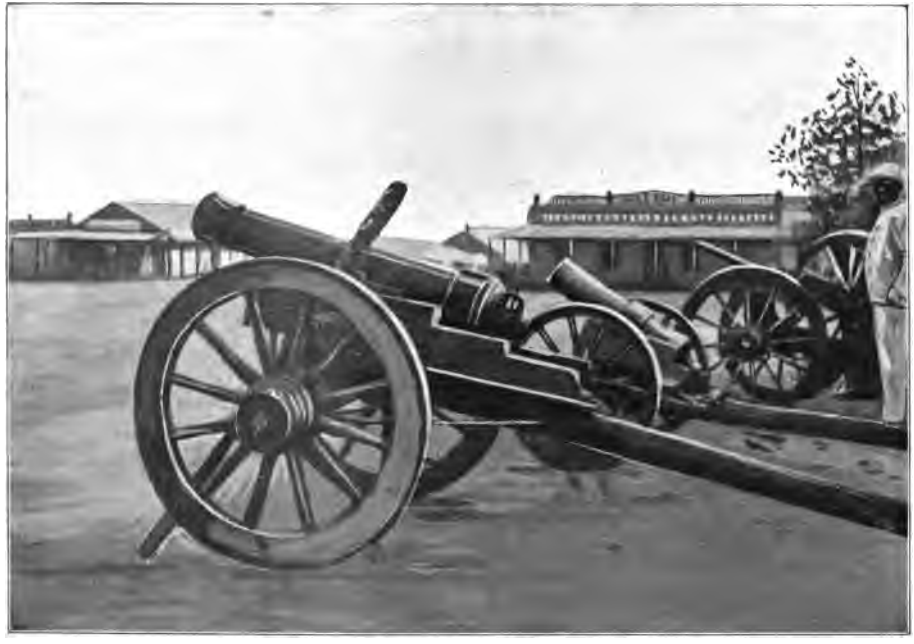
THE SMALLEST DEFENDER OF MAFEKING.

This little boy is the son of Mr. Winter, the manager of Dixon's Hotel. On his right are Lady Sarah Wilson and Major Goold-Adams, and on his left Major-General Baden-Powell and Staff at the Queen's Birthday Parade.

[*To face p.* 260.

On May 22 I rode out to the scene of the action on the 16th, and by a lucky error of direction took a line that led rather too much to the north. The result was that I arrived upon the ground a little beyond the right of the Boer position, and consequently realized what might have escaped my notice had I at once become interested in the actual scene of the fight and the various incidents that I had observed thereon. It seemed to me—as I have already stated when describing the fight—that the Boers lost a fine opportunity. Beyond the right of their line of battle the bush is much thicker than elsewhere, and the ground has a slightly superior command. Here, say 1000 men might have been concealed and remained inactive until we had become fairly committed to our advance against the front of the position. Then a counter-attack, beginning with a heavy fire against our left flank, from a concealed enemy, could scarcely have failed to produce a marked effect, and might even have resulted in our defeat. True, our flanking parties would by this time have also entered the bush, and would have found and engaged this new enemy. But smokeless powder has revolutionized the conditions of wood fighting. It used to be understood that "once within the wood, assailants and defenders are on equal terms." This is no longer a fact. The defenders can still see their opponents as they advance from tree to tree, but the latter, upon the contrary, are no longer able to locate those who are firing upon them. Thus a comparatively small number of the ambushed Boers might

easily have "contained" our men on their own flank, whilst the bulk of their force in the wood devoted its entire attention to enfilading the left of our main attack. Formerly I was of opinion that the Boers in adopting the plan of endeavouring to check us by means of a "bogie" in the shape of our own fears for imaginary danger to our flanks and rear, had done the best that could have been done; but upon after consideration I am inclined to think differently. Of course the fact remains that the plan actually adopted might have succeeded admirably if applied against a less resolute commander than Colonel Mahon, or if the defence of our right rear had been committed to a less able leader than the gallant Peakman. But actually the plan failed, and it is therefore interesting to consider whether, under the conditions existing, another might not have been more successful. There were two courses open to the Boers. They might have elected to resist us by simply holding their ground, and if possible defeating our efforts to dislodge them; or they might, as they actually did, resort to a stratagem. Their choice of the latter alternative resulted in their defeat; but had they employed the first they might not improbably have been successful. It must be remembered that whilst Mahon was hampered by the presence of a large convoy, the Boers were absolutely independent of such ties. Consequently in a trial of manœuvring skill our opponents had very much the best of us. Mahon was not strong enough to guard his convoy and at the same time



"The Lord Nelson"—an old naval gun. "The Wolf" howitzer—made from a drain-pipe. A Nordenfeldt quick-firer.

THE MAFEKING ARTILLERY.

[*To face p.* 262.

execute a wide turning movement. His only chance was to go straight at his enemy with his convoy following closely behind his line of battle. This he did, and in the event succeeded in defeating the Boers and relieving Mafeking.

In considering the features of this smart little action, it should be borne in mind that the attacking force (or rather, the force which was strategically the assailant) was slightly inferior in numbers to the defenders, and consequently, according to all recognized theories of war, was incapable of delivering a successful attack—and yet it succeeded. The explanation of this may perhaps be found in the fact that the enemy attempted to seize the initiative by the adoption of the tactical offensive, and in his method of applying this usually excellent plan lost the power to bring superior numbers to the decisive point, *i.e.* on the main front of his battle. The formidable body which showed itself on our right and right rear, not only failed to create the desired "bogie," but by its absence from the scene of decisive struggle deprived the enemy of some 700 riflemen, or, roughly, of one-third of his whole force. Rifle bullets we could not have ignored, but upon the bogie we bestowed scarcely any attention. Thus, although inferior in total numbers, we actually were permitted to enjoy a slight numerical superiority at the decisive point. So by Divine Providence, good leadership, and good fighting, we gained a complete victory.

A train from Gaberones arrived on the evening of the 22nd with a small quantity of supplies, which were very

welcome, but from all accounts there was little hope of plenty being restored in Mafeking from northern resources. Carrington's force was said to be consuming the consignments arriving *viâ* Beira almost as fast as they were received. It was to Kimberley and the south that our eyes were turned, and from this direction we had so far obtained not even a despatch to tell us the latest news. We were on half rations of bread, and without news from the outer world. Hence many disliked their condition and longed to see it altered. Personally, my chief trouble was a constant apprehension that the British flag might be re-hoisted in Pretoria before I could reach that city. Having taken part in the trooping of the colour and hoisting the flag at Pretoria in May, 1877,* I had a pardonable ambition to be present at the final ceremony. My hopes were actually doomed to disappointment.

The parade of the troops on the Queen's birthday was necessarily rather a small affair in consequence of the comparatively large number of officers and men absent on duty. The surrounding country was practically clear of the enemy, but Mafeking being within less than a dozen miles of the Transvaal frontier, it is obvious that an efficient system of patrols had to be maintained under all circumstances. The actual numbers on parade probably fell short of thirty per cent. of the strength of the corps represented. The Imperial Light Horse

* The annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 was effected by the 1st Battalion of my regiment—with two guns and a detachment of half a dozen sappers.

QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY PARADE, MAFEKING.

Brigadier-General Mahon and Staff defiling past Major-General Baden-Powell.

[*To face p.* 264.

and the Kimberley Mounted Corps made a fair show, owing to their initial advantages in point of numbers, but the other units were represented by mere detachments, between which the usual intervals were left open, with the result that the line looked rather ragged, except on the left, where the Imperial Light Horse and Kimberley Mounted Corps were posted together. However, when at the conclusion of the ceremony the troops defiled past Baden-Powell, no Boer sympathizer who may have been present can have failed to admit to himself, albeit unwillingly, that the men looked absolutely worthy of the great cause which their valour and endurance had so recently vindicated. The colonial Britisher cannot "present arms" with the skill of a regular soldier, but he can ride and shoot and fight, and one's confidence in his prowess rises higher and higher the more and the oftener one looks at him. Personally, he inspires me with an infinite admiration. In the ranks of the Imperial Light Horse and of the Kimberley Mounted Corps, there were all sorts and conditions of men, including millionaires and others. But in the richest and in the poorest there was the same spirit of self-sacrificing patriotism and determination to do their utmost duty without the smallest regard to the great inconveniences, pecuniary and otherwise, that their protracted period of service entailed. The Empire owes much to its colonial sons, than whom Her Majesty has no more loyal or more useful subjects.

Side by side with their colonial brethren in arms

stood the smart soldiers of M Battery, Royal Horse Artillery and the "Pom-pom" detachment, worthy representatives of the Imperial Regular Army. The "show" was a small one in itself, but the occasion was a great one, and when three lusty cheers were given in honour of Her Majesty's birthday by the men who had so recently effected the relief of beleaguered Mafeking, the pride of race which manifestly pervaded all present seemed as justifiable as the presence of any muster, however great, could possibly have made it.

In the afternoon we had a gymkhana, and during its progress there arrived the first through train from Bulawayo, decked with Union Jacks and evergreens, and well laden with much-needed supplies for the garrison and townsfolk. A larger bread ration was the immediate and highly satisfactory result of this.

The evening of Her Majesty's birthday was celebrated by a dinner given by Major-General Baden-Powell to about fifty representatives of the defenders and of the relief columns. Colonel Plumer returned by rail from the north in order to be present. In spite of the absence of many things generally regarded as essential, we had an excellent dinner, and the healths of the Queen and of the various commanders and others were drank with as much enthusiasm as if champagne had been flowing in unlimited quantities. Whisky-and-water answered the purpose admirably, and there were many of the company who had for some time been unaccustomed to even so moderate a luxury. After dinner a number of

Diner du 24th Mai 1900, Mafeking.

Hors d'oeuvres.

Anchois Snyman.

Consomme Reine Victoria.

Entrees.

Tournedos Cronje.

Sauce Eloff.

Curry Baden- Powell à l'Indienne.

Riz Sec

Poulet Sauté (volé) au Mahon.

Rotis.

Selle de Mouton Transvaal, Sauce Plumer.

Pauw.

Legumes.

Entrements.

Baba au Dop.

Boers on Toast.

Vins.

Scotch Whisky.

Eau Molopo, Sec.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN.

DINNER GIVEN ON THE QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY BY MAJOR-GENERAL BADEN-POWELL.

[*To face p.* 266.

rockets, unearthed by some most deserving person, were discharged into the air and elsewhere, the sticks of those that succeeded in mounting properly into space frequently descending with an alarming clatter upon the corrugated iron roofs of the neighbouring houses. Many a sleeper must have awakened with an idea that the bombardment of Mafeking had recommenced.

On Saturday, the 26th, the special correspondents of the *Times, Morning Post, Daily Telegraph, Manchester Guardian,* and *Daily Mail* with Mahon's Relief Column, combined in giving a dinner to the Brigadier and Staff. The correspondent of the *Daily Mail* being in hospital suffering from a severe wound received during the action near the Maratsani river upon the previous Sunday, was necessarily absent from the entertainment, but a cheery and amusing letter written from his bed was read by the chairman amid many expressions of regret for the sender's absence and for the cause of it. Every one had a wild mania for obtaining autographs of eminent and other persons upon "siege-notes," or any other convenient documents; consequently, after dinner, the entire company exchanged autographs written on their respective menu cards. Each card needed fourteen signatures to complete it, and each was endorsed with that number. Thus, during quite a considerable period, we were all busy. "Siege-notes"—being paper-money representing small sums from one shilling upwards—and "siege-stamps," were being freely sold at high prices. The craze for obtaining specimens was already very strong

indeed, a complete set of siege-stamps costing as much as £25. I did not invest.

On the morning of Monday, May 28, we were suddenly electrified by an order to the Brigadier to march south with his force and join General Hunter at the "rail-head," at Maribogo, where supplies would await our arrival. No time was lost, and at 3 p.m. the column started on its way, but halted for the night on the Reit Spruit, only about four miles from Mafeking. Water is always the great difficulty, more especially during the dry season, so that the length of marches must be regulated accordingly. The Transvaal boundary fence is close to the route by which we marched, and on Tuesday morning our patrols crossed over, with the result that two wagons with their spans of oxen were captured. These provided a most welcome increase to our transport train. The sudden order to move found a number of our wagons under repair, and in a condition that rendered it impossible for some to be refitted in time—consequently the remainder had to be much overloaded. During the second and third day's march we saw ample evidence that in making a detour *viâ* Jan Mabissi's, instead of marching straight on Mafeking, Colonel Mahon had exercised a most sound discretion. The Boers had evidently expected us to choose the shorter road direct from the Maratsani river to Reit Spruit, and had made most careful arrangements to give us a warm reception. Indeed, our situation might easily have been rendered most critical if, after a twenty

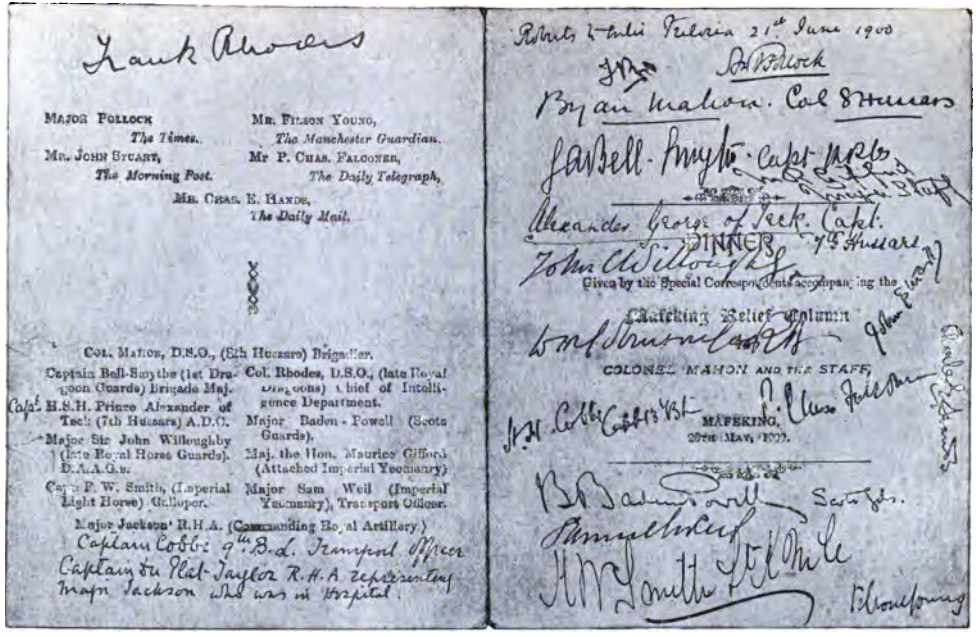
[illegible]

[illegible] Virginia.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]



Frank Rhodes

MAJOR POLLOCK
The Times.

MR. FILSON YOUNG,
The Manchester Guardian.

MR. JOHN STUART,
The Morning Post.

MR P. CHAS. FALCONER,
The Daily Telegraph,

MR. CHAS. E. HANDS,
The Daily Mail.

COL. MAHON, D.S.O., (8th Hussars) Brigadier.

Captain Bell-Smythe (1st Dragoon Guards) Brigade Maj.

Col. Rhodes, D.S.O., (late Royal Dragoons) Chief of Intelligence Department.

Capt. H.S.H. Prince Alexander of Teck (7th Hussars) A.D.C.

Major Baden-Powell (Scots Guards).

Major Sir John Willoughby (late Royal Horse Guards). D.A.A.G.s.

Maj. the Hon. Maurice Gifford (Attached Imperial Yeomanry)

Capt. F. W. Smith, (Imperial Light Horse) Galloper.

Major Sam Weil (Imperial Yeomanry), Transport Officer.

Major Jackson R.H.A. (Commanding Royal Artillery.)

Captain Cobbe 9th B.L. Transport Officer

Captain du Plat-Taylor R.H.A. representing Major Jackson who was in Hospital.

Roberts to Mahon Pretoria 21st June 1900

Sir B Pollock

By an Mahon. Col 8 Hussars

J A Bell-Smythe Capt. R.H.A.

Alexander George of Teck. Capt. 7th Hussars

John C Willoughby

DINNER

Given by the Special Correspondents accompanying the

Marching Relief Column

COLONEL MAHON AND THE STAFF,

MAFEKING,

28TH MAY, 1900.

Cobbe Capt 13th Bt

B P Baden Powell Scots Gds.

H W Smith 1st Mile

F Cleve Fullerton

Charles Edwards

F Brouffoung

THE GUESTS AND HOSTS.

[*Between pp.* 268, 269.

miles' march without water, we had been confronted by formidable entrenchments, barring our approach to the watering-place at Reit Spruit. In short, had we been unable to force the way, we should have been compelled to retreat, about twenty miles, over a waterless tract, and during such an ordeal not only transport animals, but many men and horses must certainly have succumbed; whilst all must have endured terrible sufferings. The Intelligence Department of the Relief Column was in the able hands of Colonel Frank Rhodes, and to this fact, as well as to the imperturbable good sense of the Brigadier, we are much indebted for the success of the expedition. To have accurate information always up to date, and a commander who knows how to make use of it, forms perhaps the most reliable guarantee for the happy issue of military enterprises.

On Wednesday, May 30, we reached Maratsani Siding, where we found the railway bridge absolutely destroyed and the line much damaged. It was at the same time amusing to observe how the Boers had in many cases failed to do the utmost damage that a given amount of labour should have secured. For example: many rails had been smashed with gun-cotton or some similar explosive, but in no case had the charge been applied at the junction of two rails. Consequently, the actual damage done represented just half that which the expenditure of explosives should have realized. Apart, however, from the question of replacing broken bridges and culverts, there seemed to

be no difficulties connected with a very rapid reconstruction of the permanent way. The line had already been repaired up to a point about six miles north of Maribogo, and the first train might therefore be expected to reach Mafeking within a fortnight. The system under which South African railways are constructed renders it very difficult to destroy them effectually. There are very few long bridges, and there are practically no tunnels. Where in Europe a tunnel would certainly be constructed, the African engineer boldly lays out gradients so steep that it seems almost impossible that heavily laden trains should climb them. The train runs down the slope of one hill as fast as steam and the force of gravity can drive it, and by means of the energy thus acquired, charges up the opposite slope. There is a painfully laboured snorting from the overtaxed engine towards the end of its effort, but finally it gains the plateau above, and its troubles for the time are over.

During Wednesday's march I had a remarkable slice of luck whilst carrying my gun on the flank of the column. I marked down a brace of koran (bustards), and having dismounted about fifty yards from the spot, proceeded to walk them up. The two rose in quick succession. My right barrel missed fire. A stifled expletive, and the discharge of the left barrel followed promptly and simultaneously. At this moment koran No. 1 crossed the line of koran No. 2, and to my surprise and delight both fell to the shot, No. 1 having by this time placed quite sixty yards between himself

and the gun, and being quite fifteen yards beyond No. 2. The immediate result of this happy and rather remarkable accident was a dinner-party, with the koran as not only the *pièce de résistance*, but practically the all-in-all. The birds were stewed in a stock made of bovril, with chûtnee, salt, pepper, and chopped bacon. Then, half an hour before dinner, the contents of two tins of "road rations" (less the meat) were added. A portion of the liquor drawn off at the last moment served as soup. The general result was that three persons concluded that they had eaten a most excellent dinner. The koran is a first-rate bird, but it needs an artist to roast him properly—hence the decision to adopt the plan described. Our guest was Vernon Kyrke of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, a most excellent young soldier, who has since distinguished himself with Lord Methuen's column.

On Thursday morning, on our arrival at Kraipan, the news reached us of Lord Roberts' entry into Johannesburg, and that General Hunter had entered the Transvaal without waiting for Mahon to join him. Glad as we all were at the successful occupation of the Rand, and the consequent safety of the mines, we were selfish enough to wish that the event might have been postponed for a few days in order that we should have been better situated as regards the chances of being present at the entry into Pretoria. At Kraipan we also heard from the Kaffir Chief Malsheta that after our fight between Koodoos Rand and the Maratsani, on Sunday, May 13, his men had been those employed by the Boers

to dig graves for the fallen, of whom no less than twenty-two were buried. Fighting in thick bush, it is not easy to estimate losses upon the other side, and upon the occasion in question night fell so soon after the action was over that we had no opportunity of examining the ground that had been occupied by the enemy. That so many as twenty-two Boers should have been killed in so short an engagement, and under circumstances that generally prevented the combatants from seeing one another, seems almost incredible. But Malsheta was positive, and, in default of evidence to the contrary, his statement must be accepted as true. Meanwhile it must be borne in mind that we ourselves supposed the Boer losses to have been approximately equal to our own—*i.e.* about thirty of all sorts. Yet, upon the other hand, the sudden collapse of the Boer attack requires explanation, and the supposition that—as this occurred just as our artillery and pom-poms became active—heavy losses were the cause, is not unjustifiable.

At 8 a.m. next day we arrived at Maribogo Siding, but were obliged to continue our march to a "pan" about five miles further on, in order to obtain water. The supply was scanty, and once more, in consequence of having no engineer detachment to rig pumps and troughs, we were compelled to drink extremely dirty water. So dirty was the water that even in a bath its appearance was decidedly uninviting. With proper appliances, plenty of excellent water could easily have been obtained.

Just after we had finished breakfast on the morning

after our arrival at Maribogo, General Hart, with the advanced portion of his brigade, marched through on the track of General Hunter, who had accompanied Barton's Fusilier Brigade a couple of days previously. To my surprise I met Thomson of my old regiment, who had, it appeared, become aide-de-camp to the General, and from him I heard for the first time that the second battalion had been transferred to General Hart's Brigade, and that four companies would reach Maribogo the same evening. Thomson had to follow his General without much delay, and, as soon as he had departed, I started off with my gun to obtain the wherewithal for a dinner-party. I was lucky in getting a leash of koran, and thus became ready to welcome my old friends. We had not "kit" for more than two guests, so Williams and Whatman had to represent the others. I enjoyed my evening infinitely; but it made me wretched to think how, if only I had not been so foolish as to "send in my papers" when I did, I, instead of Williams, should have been in command of those four splendid companies! However, what is done is done, and it is little use grumbling over the results of our own mistakes. We are "mostly fools" if we would but acknowledge it, and the superlative conceit that prompts our folly is also the cloak that conceals it from our eyes.

With its arrival at Lichtenburg on Wednesday, June 6, the separate existence of Brigadier-General Mahon's Mafeking Relief Column came to an end, and it became a part of General Hunter's force about

to march on Potchefstroom. Our original strength was reduced by the discharge of a portion of the Kimberley Mounted Corps, but this loss was more than made good by the addition of Colonel Burn's Scottish regiment of Imperial Yeomanry, and reinforcements of Imperial Light Horse under Colonel Wools Samson. Lieut.-Colonel Edwards, who commanded the Imperial Light Horse during the relief of Mafeking, and pending the recovery and arrival of Colonel Wools Samson, became Assistant Adjutant-General of the Mounted Brigade, which was intended to number about 1500 of all ranks, including M Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, and Robinson's pom-poms.

The march from Maribogo to Lichtenburg was uneventful. On the way we passed General Hart's Brigade, still marching in two portions—that in advance under the Brigadier, and the rear half under Colonel Brooke, of the Connaught Rangers. The "Irish Brigade" had suffered severely during the relief of Ladysmith, and two of its battalions were so weakened that it was found necessary to replace them with others. The Somerset Light Infantry and the Border Regiment were therefore brought in, and it is amusing to recall the fact that these were the two battalions described by the imaginative correspondent of a London paper—in relation to the relief of Wepener—as Hart's "Superb Irish Brigade"! Actually Hart had no Irishmen with him upon that occasion. Talking of the Somersets, it seems a pity, upon sentimental grounds, that this regiment was not given a place in Lord Roberts' army in

order that it might lead the entry into Pretoria. The Transvaal was annexed in 1877 by a column under Colonel Pearson, consisting of two guns, the 1st Battalion 13th Prince Albert's (Somerset) Light Infantry and a small detachment of sappers; consequently the Somersets had an undeniable claim to a share in the reoccupation of Pretoria in 1900.

General Hunter's arrival at Lichtenburg speedily resulted in the solution of a pressing difficulty caused by armed Kaffirs, who had been looting in all directions. Marauders caught red-handed were shot, and the chiefs were warned that they must keep their young men at home or incur serious penalties. The Kaffirs who proved troublesome were partly natives of the Transvaal and partly Baralongs and others from about Mafeking. Under the stress of circumstances actually existing at the time, Colonel Baden-Powell was fully justified in arming a portion of the Baralongs for the defence of their staats, which actually formed part of the town of Mafeking. But so soon as the need for their services had been removed, not a moment should have been lost in resuming possession of the rifles and ammunition that had been served out. The Kaffirs had, indeed, done good and faithful service during the siege; but it would have been better to risk offending them by prompt disarmament, than to incur the certainty of being obliged subsequently to shoot them for marauding. Hating the Boers as they do, the conduct of the Kaffirs was but natural; but had they been without rifles they would have remained comparatively

quiet. A very superior Boer, with whom I talked one day on the march from Maribogo, complained bitterly that whilst he himself had been disarmed by our troops, the Kaffirs had been left free to loot his farm. He was obliged to look on whilst his property was being stolen or destroyed, but had he been permitted to retain his rifle he could have defended himself. I explained to him that the disarmament of the burghers was a necessary proceeding towards the pacification of the country, and that the Kaffir nuisance was only a matter of a few days. But he declined to be convinced as to the propriety of the situation, and his attitude seems by no means remarkable.

On Thursday, June 7, I parted with poor "Jess" with infinite regret. She had carried me exceedingly well for eight months, but it had now become perfectly clear that she could do so no more. The man to whom I sold her, a British storekeeper at Lichtenburg, declared that he meant to give her three months' rest before attempting to use her again, and I saw no reason to disbelieve him, because his obvious advantage lay in keeping her until she could command a high price.

On the same day my friend Young, of the *Manchester Guardian*, who had now shared my fortunes for three months, received a wire recalling him to England; and I was glad to jump at the chance of securing "Little Bobs." Young was one of the first to go, but within a fortnight the great majority of the special correspondents had received their orders for home.

At 7.30 next morning we started for Ventersdorp,

and trekked as far as Putfontein, eighteen miles. I shot at a plover on the way, just to see whether "Little Bobs" would let me shoot off his back, and had the double gratification of eating the bird, and finding that Bobs had no objection to being regarded as a shooting pony. At 4 a.m. on the 9th we marched to Ventersdorp, twenty-four miles, and there heard of the extraordinary disaster to the Derbyshire Militia, which, as the story reached us, entailed the capture of Kroonstad by De Wet. The truth was not quite so bad, but what actually occurred at Roodeval was quite bad enough. So far as I am aware, the staff officer responsible for dumping down a militia battalion out of the train in a dangerous position, at 11 p.m. on a dark night, has not yet been hanged.

At Ventersdorp we remained until 4 p.m. on Sunday, when we received orders to march to Potchefstroom with all possible speed. The distance *viâ* Frederichstad is forty-one miles, and was accomplished in nineteen hours—not bad going for a column which had been almost continually on the march for over a month. When we were still about five miles from our destination, Colonel Edwards rode forward in front of the advanced guard and kindly permitted me to accompany him. We made a party of half a dozen in all, and when about four miles from Potchefstroom met a train coming out, and galloped hard to cut it off. This we did successfully, and the officials descended to parley. As I rode up to them with one or two others, I noticed that there was considerable perturbation and a frequent

and vehement throwing up of hands. In search for the cause I looked round and observed a distinguished officer grimly advancing, determination stamped upon every feature, with a Mauser pistol in one hand and a revolver in the other—both pointed at the "enemy." It was represented to him that the men were unarmed, and he then lowered his weapons with an air of disappointment that was truly comical. Captain Bell Smythe, who had now come up, sent the train back to Potchefstroom—and so the matter ended. We had an enthusiastic reception, and whilst the staff held functions at the Landrost's office, I had breakfast at the Hotel, and wrote a telegram for the *Times*, which I fondly hoped would go before any other correspondent got near the wires. I believe it was despatched about ten days later, in company with about a dozen others.

Major Coke, of Burn's Yeomanry, shortly after our arrival at Potchefstroom got wind of a Boer despatch-rider having passed through, and promptly gave chase, catching the man about fourteen miles from the town. The captured despatches gave most important information, and Coke was very properly taken on the Intelligence Staff as the reward for his good performance.

On Tuesday morning I went out to shoot snipe, but had bad luck: saw only twelve birds, killed five, missed three, and had four miss-fires—for the latter I cursed Mr. Poole of Kimberley, who had sold me the cartridges, and for the scarcity of snipe, the increase of the British population since I had been in the country twenty-three years before. The same morning, trooper Forbes

Mackay, Scottish Yeomanry, reached Potchefstroom from Johannesburg, after a great feat of physical endurance. The entry in my diary reads as follows :—

"On Saturday last a despatch in triplicate was sent by General Hunter from Ventersdorp to Johannesburg, (1) by Mackay, (2) an officer's patrol (mounted), (3) a native runner. At 12.30 p.m. Mackay left on a bicycle, which broke down after twenty-five miles. He continued on foot, and, losing his way, travelled *viâ* Krugersdorp, making total journey ninety miles, of which sixty-five on foot. Arrived at Johannesburg 11 a.m. Sunday—five hours before the patrol. Staff officer referred him for rations, etc., to regiment three miles off. Went to regiment, got nothing—no orders —returned to Johannesburg and was then fed. Left Johannesburg, on a fresh bike, for Potchefstroom, 4.20 p.m. Monday; arrived 3.45 a.m. Tuesday, again beating the patrol. Native runner not heard of since."

I admire Mackay as a man, and the "staff officer" as a conundrum.

At Potchefstroom I received a parcel from home containing tobacco and other useful things—but no letters. On inquiring at the Field Post Office as to how a parcel by the very last possible mail had reached me, but no letters, I was told that the parcel must have been "miss-sorted," as letters for Colonel Mahon's column were being sent to Johannesburg! I wish they had "miss-sorted" things directed to me a little oftener, and thus permitted them to be sent where I happened to be instead of the contrary. I received no letters

from the time I left Kimberley, May 2, until I reached Cape Town on June 28. Most of the missing have since been delivered to me in England. On Saturday, 16th, we trekked to Wolverdiend, where we again met Hart's Brigade. The night was wet and very cold. Next day marched at 8 a.m. fifteen miles to Blauwbank—a wet ride. In the afternoon there was a false alarm that De Wet was trying to get past, and we all turned out to intercept him. De Wet proved to be one of our own squadrons returning from a patrol on the right flank.

On Monday, after covering the march of the division for thirteen miles during the morning, Mahon's force was ordered to occupy Krugersdorp with all possible speed. The distance, a good fifteen miles from the bifurcation of the Doornkop and Krugersdorp roads, was covered in two hours and twenty minutes. M Battery R.H.A. under Captain Du Plat Taylor (Major Jackson having been left behind sick) kept up all the way with the cavalry, whilst Robinson's pom-poms, drawn by *Colonial* horses, were left a long way behind. And yet people say that English horses are no good in South Africa! It is not the horses that are to blame, but the silly people who mismanage them. Treated rationally, *i.e.* on Colonial lines, an English horse that is worth his passage out will wear down any Colonial. The march to Krugersdorp made M Battery horses sweat a good deal, but did them no harm whatever. Yet they had been working hard for six weeks on short rations of grain, and had done many forced marches.

At Randfontein, on the way, we surprised and captured 200 prisoners.

On Tuesday morning I went to see the Paardekraal monument—a hideous edifice the architect of which deserves capital punishment, and whilst I wasted my time looking at it, there was a small outpost affair in which one man of the Imperial Light Horse was dangerously wounded. In the afternoon I trekked to Johannesburg, where I put up at Heath's Hotel, and enjoyed the unaccustomed luxury of a hot bath and an excellent dinner. On Wednesday morning I met Cheatle (the consulting surgeon of whom Young and I had seen so much at Modder River and with Lord Methuen's column about Boshof), and went with him in the afternoon to see the Robinson mine. He pressed me very much to start with him for Cape Town the following morning, but this I could not do, as I had to sell my horses and cart, and the only market was the Remount Depôt, to which I was taking the whole outfit next day. Had I been able to accompany Cheatle I should have come in for Colonel Bullock's gallant fight at Honing Spruit, and either had a great deal more to write now, or else been numbered amongst those who are buried close to that railway station. Actually I left Johannesburg on Friday, and after many delays reached Cape Town on the following Thursday. The journey down country was necessarily slow, owing to the railway having been broken up by De Wet, and a number of bridges had to be repaired before the train could pass. On the way I met General

Smith-Dorrien, whom I had not seen since Poplar Grove. He was in charge of the posts protecting the line from Johannesburg to Kroonstad, and was inspecting the scenes of the recent disasters. The fight at Roodeval, where the Derbyshires were cut up, appears to have been going on at two places simultaneously, the Railway Pioneers being also involved; this I had not previously heard. Major Gale, commanding the Railway Detachment, was killed by the first shell, when the charge of the company devolved upon two American officers, Lieutenants Stocket and Thurstan, both of whom behaved admirably—Thurstan, who had joined with no idea of fighting being still likely to occur, especially distinguishing himself. The positions both of the Pioneers and of the Derbys seem to have been equally untenable, and therefore ill-chosen. At Roodeval I picked up the cylinder of one of our nine-inch howitzer shells that the Boers had destroyed, and took it with me. I am now using it as an umbrella stand, and as it weighs 200 lbs. have no fear of its being stolen.

Passing Laingsberg at 4 a.m. my son met me. He seemed fit and well, and after the manner of boys, although it was freezing hard, was without a great-coat. I had previously arranged with his commanding officer that he should have a few days' leave, in order to see me at Cape Town before I sailed, and two days after my arrival there he duly joined me. I fear that he spent most of his leave in the train. On Wednesday, July 4, I sailed for England in the *Dunottar Castle,*

the same ship in which I had left home on October 14. This was an accident; but to make history complete, I managed to obtain the same cabin—all to myself, as it had but one berth. On the *Dunottar* were several others besides myself who had sailed in her from Southampton with Sir Redvers Buller—Atkins of the *Manchester Guardian*, and his wife; Winston Churchill; Captain Campbell (late Scots Guards) Laffan's agency, and I fancy others. Besides these, there were several that I had met before in one place or another, including the majority of the foreign attachés. We had a pleasant voyage and plenty of fun at times. A debate in the smoking-room upon certain alleged shortcomings upon the part of the "Sports Committee" was especially entertaining; Wigham of the *Daily Mail*, and formerly of the *Morning Post*, particularly distinguishing himself by an extraordinary feat of very clever oratory—chiefly in the line of mock heroics. Winston Churchill spoke well, but he had been "got at" by a most unscrupulous person, whose name I believe is Neptune, and was not quite up to his proper form. Burnham, the American scout, was on board, as well as other celebrities. We reached Southampton on July 20, and within a week I received a rather unwelcome intimation to the effect that I was required for duty as an officer of the Reserve. The result of this is that nearly all the foregoing pages have been written in Raglan Barracks, Devonport.

APPENDIX I.

Mr. Reitz's Manifesto.

To the Editor of the "Cape Times."

Sir,—My attention has only just now been drawn to the manifesto of Mr. Reitz, State Secretary of the Transvaal, to the Orange Free State burghers, as published in the *Cape Argus* 19th inst.

In this shameful and shameless document, Sir Alfred Milner, Mr. Chamberlain, the British Cabinet, the Queen of England, and the British nation are declared to be murderers, robbers, breakers of treaties, etc.; and the responsibility for the present war between the Republics and England is sought to be laid on their shoulders in a wealth of scurrilous and mendacious statement.

I feel impelled to write the following lines, not to discuss matters which have passed beyond the pale of argument, but to throw a little personal historic light on the question as to who is responsible for the present war, which may serve to show that not England, nor England's Queen, nor England's Government, are the real originators of the same.

Appendix I.

I met Mr. Reitz, then a judge of the Orange Free State, in Bloemfontein between seventeen and eighteen years ago, shortly after the retrocession of the Transvaal, and when he was busy establishing the Afrikander Bond. It must be patent to every one that at that time, at all events, England and its Government had no intention of taking away the independence of the Transvaal, for she had just "magnanimously" granted the same; no intention of making war on the Republics, for she had just made peace; no intention to seize the Rand gold-fields, for they were not yet discovered. At that time, then, I met Mr. Reitz, and he did his best to get me to become a member of his Afrikander Bond, but after studying its constitution and programme I refused to do so, whereupon the following colloquy in substance took place between us, which has been indelibly imprinted on my mind ever since—

Reitz: "Why do you refuse? Is the object of getting the people to take an interest in political matters not a good one?"

Myself: "Yes, it is; but I seem to see plainly here between the lines of this constitution much more ultimately aimed at than that."

Reitz: "What?"

Myself: "I see quite clearly that the ultimate object aimed at is the overthrow of the British power, and the expulsion of the British flag from South Africa."

Reitz (with his pleasant, conscious smile, as of one whose secret thought and purpose had been discovered,

and who was not altogether displeased that such was the case): "Well, what if it is so?"

Myself: "You don't suppose, do you, that that flag is going to disappear from South Africa without a tremendous struggle and fight?"

Reitz (with the same pleasant, self-conscious, self-satisfied, and yet semi-apologetic smile): "Well, I suppose not; but even so, what of that?"

Myself: "Only this, that when that struggle takes place you and I will be on opposite sides; and what is more, the God who was on the side of the Transvaal in the late war, because it had right on its side, will be on the side of England, because He must view with abhorrence any plotting and scheming to overthrow her power and position in South Africa, which have been ordained by Him."

Reitz: "We'll see."

Thus the conversation ended, but during the seventeen years that have elapsed I have watched the propaganda for the overthrow of British power in South Africa being ceaselessly spread by every possible means —the press, the pulpit, the platform, the schools, the colleges, the legislature—until it has culminated in the present war, of which Mr. Reitz and his co-workers are the origin and cause. Believe me, sir, the day on which F. W. Reitz sat down to pen his ultimatum to Great Britain was the proudest and happiest moment of his life, and one which had for long years been looked forward to by him with eager longing and expectation.

He and his co-workers have for years past plotted,

worked, prepared for this war; and the only matters in connection with it in which they are disappointed are, firstly, that they would rather the war had come several years later, so that their anti-British propaganda might more fully have permeated the country; secondly, that they would liked to have declared war against England at a time when she should be involved in some great struggle with a foreign Power, instead of at a time when she is free to give all her attention to South Africa; and, lastly, they are disappointed in finding out that English soldiers can fight.

It *is* true that an active factor in bringing about this war has been the existence of the Gold-fields of the Rand, not, however, as asserted, because England covets them, and has determined to seize them, but because the wealth drained from them has enabled the Republics to become military powers of a strength far out of proportion to their population, and thus has led F. W. Reitz and Co. to think that their dream of a Pan-Afrikander Republic and the ousting of the British flag may become a reality. Hence their declaration of war against England rather than grant just political rights to the inhabitants, whom that same wealth has led to settle down in the Transvaal, and whose presence and numbers, however useful to the Dutch Republics towards the production of wealth to be used for the setting forward of their political aims, might, if they became possessors of the franchise, prove damaging to the success of the scheme of the great Pan-Afrikander Republic. Although I have been obliged in this record

of an historic reminiscence to mention the Afrikander Bond, I do not wish to be supposed to be attacking that body as it exists in the Cape Colony at the present time, or to accuse it of backing Mr. Reitz up in his declaration of war against the British Empire. Its leaders claim that it and they are loyal to England. So be it! My object is to show that, not the British Government, but the Republics—led by Kruger, Reitz, Steyn, and their co-workers—have been steadily marching on towards this war, and consciously plotting for it, ever since the "magnanimous" retrocession of the Transvaal by England, and even before the Witwatersrand Gold-fields were discovered.

I am, etc.,

THEO. SCHREINER.

Riversdale, October 31, 1899.

APPENDIX II.

Bond Treason.

To the Editor of the "Cape Times."

Sir,—There are many old residents in South Africa who could relate conversations similar to that which appears in your issue of to-day between Mr. Theo. Schreiner and Mr. Reitz, although to the majority of our British fellow-colonists the inner teaching of the Bond propaganda has come as a surprise only recently, because when they heard seditious harangues by Bond members at meetings of farmers' associations and among other local coteries, they attached little importance to it, as at the time they had not the means of knowing how widespread and far-reaching was the evil. There is one paragraph, however, in Mr. Schreiner's letter of which I disapprove, because he gives the accused the benefit of a doubt where no doubt need exist. He says, "Although I have been obliged in this record of an historic reminiscence to mention the Afrikander Bond, I do not wish to be supposed to be attacking that body as it exists in the Cape Colony at the present time, or to accuse it of backing Mr. Reitz up in his declaration of war against the British Empire.

Its leaders claim that it and they are loyal to England. So be it! My object is to show that, not the British Government, but the Republics—led by Kruger, Reitz, Steyn, and their co-workers—have been steadily marching on towards this war, and consciously plotting for it, ever since the 'magnanimous' retrocession of the Transvaal by England, and even before the Witwatersrand Gold-fields were discovered."

Now, sir, those who have watched the movement in country districts more closely than Mr. Schreiner probably has done, maintain that the Bond wire pullers in Cape Town are at the bottom of the whole business. Years ago there were young farmers (Dutch as well as English) who quietly withdrew from the Bond, giving as their reason that its objects were *treasonable.* At a later period men began to discover that the organization was dropping its more fiery political creed, and was settling down to do useful work in the farmers' interests generally. But never was anything more clear than that the head-centre and his coadjutors found that they had been going a little too fast. Accordingly the order went out that in future milk must be the food for babes in treason, and that the strong meat must be reserved for the older conspirators. To this day the leopard has not changed his spots, and he never will. Reitz and company would never have been heard of outside their own villages, had they not chanced to be on the spot where the Bond armoury and treasure chest were started out of the earnings of a peaceful industrial population. Had the dear Bond friends of the farmer

transferred their energy from political agitations to the fostering of agricultural pursuits, the Cape Colony would not to-day have to import the bulk of its food from over sea, while the value of its produce shipments would have doubled.

I am, etc.,

BRITON.

Cape Town, November 6, 1899.

THE END.

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.